

Rhode Island Public Financing of Elections Act

A BRIEF OVERVIEW:

The Rhode Island Public Financing of Elections Act would implement a fully voluntary system of public financing of elections and is sponsored in the state House by Representative Edith Ajello and in the state Senate by Senator Rhoda Perry.

Participating candidates who collect enough \$5 qualifying contributions from their constituents, proving that they hold significant public interest, and who refuse to accept any private donations, qualify to receive a grant of money with which to run their campaign. Moreover, if a participating

candidate runs against a non-participating candidate, the participating candidate shall receive matching funds for every dollar spent by the non-participating candidate above the initial grant, to a limit of three times the initial grant. What little funding is required to implement publicly financed elections pales in comparison to the financial burden placed on citizens to compensate for prevailing lobbyists' interests, corruption, and scandals. The operations of the public financing system shall be overseen by the Board of Elections.

ABOUT THE RHODE ISLANDERS FOR FAIR ELECTIONS COALITION:

The Rhode Islanders for Fair Elections Coalition formed in the spring of 2004 and first introduced full public financing legislation in the spring of 2005. Putting into action a network of committed Rhode Islanders, with membership ranging from religious and environmental groups to student and government reform organizations.

The Rhode Islanders for Fair Elections Coalition is dedicated to passing the Rhode Island Public Financing of Elections Act, and it continues to work to reach out to other Rhode Island organizations, legislators, and citizens to promote a system of fair and publicly financed elections.

Supporters of the Coalition include: Common Cause Rhode Island, the League of Women Voters of Rhode Island, Operation Clean Government, the Green Party of Rhode Island, the Environmental Council, Rhode Island Public Interest Group (RIPIRG), the National Organization of Women (NOW), the American Association of University Women, United Service Allied Workers of Rhode Island (USAW-RI), Providence College for Fair Elections, and Brown University Democracy Matters.

The city councils of Providence, Newport, South Kingstown, and Barrington have all officially endorsed the bill.

"At the time that I ran for office under [public financing], my district was considered to be 'low-income' with a predominately minority-based constituency, and I had an easy time collecting the \$5 donations. Yeah, you may have to knock on a few more doors than in wealthier neighborhoods, but it can definitely get done...If you can't get the required number of signatures for [public financing] then your problem is not with the [public financing] system."

-Arizona Representative Martha Garcia



To learn more about us or to become part of the coalition, visit www.FairElectionsRI.org or email info@FairElectionsRI.org



“I would recommend the [public funding] program to anyone. Without [public funding] I would not have had the financial means to run for office in my district. [Public funding] is great because it levels the playing field so that nearly anyone can run for office”

-Arizona Representative Manuel Alvarez

IMPORTANT TERMS:

Exploratory Period: The period of time beginning the day after the previous General Election when a candidate is allowed to collect private donations of “seed money,” to an established limit, in order to determine his/her viability to run a successful campaign under the public funding system.

Seed Money: A contribution of no more than \$100 made by an individual to a potential candidate during the Exploratory Period.

Limits on seed money:

Representative: \$500

Senator: \$1,000

Governor: \$90,000

Other Statewide Office: \$56,000

*note: all seed money must be reported to the Board of Elections

Qualifying Period: The 90-day period of time when a candidate must collect a certain number of \$5 “Qualifying Contributions” from constituents in order to prove that the candidate holds public interest. Once this money is collected, it is placed into the Public Financing of Elections Fund to be distributed amongst the participating candidates for each Election Cycle.

Required Qualifying Contributions:

Representative: 50

Senator: 100

Governor: 2,500

Other Statewide Office: 1,000

Initial Grant: The amount given to qualifying candidates for the primary and general elections to be spent on their campaign.

Initial Grant Amount, Primary:

Representative: \$8,000

Senator: \$16,000

Governor: \$1,500,000

Other Statewide Office: \$600,000

Initial Grant Amount, General:

Representative: \$16,000

Senator: \$24,000

Governor: \$2,250,000

Other Statewide Office: \$900,000

Uncontested Races: When a participating candidate runs in a race with no balloted opponent that candidate receives only a portion of the initial grant. This portion is 25% for primary elections and 10% for general elections.

Matching Funds: When a participating candidate runs against a non-participating candidate who spends above the initial grant amount, the participating candidate is given additional funds to match his/her opponent’s spending up to three times the amount of the initial grant.

Third-party Candidates: Third-party and independent candidates that qualify for the system are given 25% of the initial grant for the primary election cycle and the full grant for the general election cycle.

“Contrary to the belief that low-income districts could not support the [public financing] program, I find the program most welcome among my constituents. I am in the process of serving my third term in the Maine House of Representatives and have financed every campaign using the [public financing] program. I wouldn’t do it any other way. I would lose too many low-income constituents who want to be a part of my reelection”

- Maine Senator Jim Annis

