

PUBLIC FINANCING OF ELECTIONS IS A KEY GOVERNMENT REFORM

January 24, 2011

Dear Senate Majority Leader Skelos and members of the New York State Senate,

We write to strongly encourage your leadership in proposing and enacting a voluntary system of public campaign finance early in this legislative session.

During the shared State of the State address earlier this month, you, speaker Silver, and Governor Cuomo all pledged to work across party lines to confront the toughest issues facing our state. When millions of New Yorkers voted in the last election one of the messages they were conveying was their disappointment with the gridlock, corruption, and big money influence in Albany. All New Yorkers, regardless of their party affiliation, region, race, or gender, desire a state government that works. Making Albany functional and more ethical may be a great challenge, but we are confident that if our elected officials work together great reforms can be enacted. This is why we would like to see the State Senate work with the Governor and the Assembly to craft public funding of elections legislation that is robust and effective. As good government, civil rights, environmental, labor, community, health care, social justice, and grassroots advocacy organizations, we are united in our desire for real reform. We fully support passage of a system that ends candidates' dependence on large, private campaign donations as a means to win legislative and statewide office in New York, and makes elected officials accountable to voters by allowing candidates to qualify for public funds to run their campaigns. We think New York State is ready to work together to make this reform a reality.

It will take someone in your position, to lead across party and ideology to enact this common sense approach to ethics. Along with other campaign finance reforms including lower contribution limits, closing loopholes, and strong but fair enforcement, we can drastically change the culture of Albany. The missing element is collaboration between the State Senate, Assembly, and Governor to make it happen.

For decades, our organizations have confronted a state government fraught with corruption as we advocated for changes in Albany. We know that the public interest would be better served if our elected officials were able to run for office using a system of public campaign finance, like New York City's. Such a system promotes transparency and accountability to the public. It restores the public's trust in government and encourages more participation in the electoral and legislative process. It encourages genuine debate around issues. More participation, competition and equal opportunity in our elections system are beneficial to every New Yorker.

You have an opportunity to create a more functional and productive state government and promote New York State as a national leader in government reform. The Governor has indicated as recently as the State of the State address that he is ready to enact public financing. We urge you to be a partner with him and your colleagues in the Assembly. Now is the time to enact a system of public financing of elections and make history in New York State.

Sincerely,

1199SEIU
ACT NOW
Albany Area MoveOn
Brennan Center for Justice
BWICA Educational Fund, Inc.
Center for Independence of the Disabled of New York
Citizen Action of New York
Coalition for Economic Justice
Community Voices Heard
Democracy for New York City
Democrats.com
Foundation of Integrative AIDS Research
Hunger Action Network of NY State
Jobs with Justice LI
Long Island Coalition for a National Healthplan
Long Island WINS
Manhattan Young Democrats
Metro New York Healthcare for All
NASW-NYS
NY StateWide Senior Action Council, Inc.
NYSUT
Public Accountability Initiative
Schenectady Community Action Program
Syracuse United Neighbors
WESPAC Foundation
Western New York Peace Center

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Albany Presbytery
Asociacion de Mujeres Progresistas
Brooklyn MoveOn Council
Capital Region of NY MoveOn
Center for Working Families
Citizens Union
Common Cause
CWA District 1
Democracy Matters
Drum Major Institute
Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition
Interfaith Impact of New York State
Jobs with Justice NY
Long Island Progressive Coalition
Make the Road NY
Metro Justice of Rochester
Mount Vernon United Tenants
New York State Nurses Association
NYPIRG
Peace Action of Central New York
Saratoga Area MoveOn
Social Justice Council of First Unitarian Church of Rochester
Tenants Political Action Committee
West Side Campaign Against Hunger