

Public Financing of Elections

OCG voted in 2006 to be part of a coalition for public financing of general assembly and general office candidate campaigns. This coalition is headed up by Democracy Matters at Brown University and Common Cause. See www.cleanelectionsri.org.

Maine and Arizona are two states where voters have successfully implemented a “Clean Elections” system of full public financing. This was done through voter initiative. Experiences in these states exemplify how full public financing of elections can positively impact democracy, with increased voter turnout, political transparency, and diversity of candidates, including a fuller representation of women and minorities. Connecticut recently became the third state to implement public financing of elections.

How Does a Fair Elections system work?

The “Fair Elections” system is designed to provide a clear alternative to the current system of raising and spending largely special-interest money to finance election campaigns. It allows qualified candidates to run for public office without compromising their independence since they won't have to ask for money from those with a vested interest in public policy. The system is completely voluntary and candidates who do not wish to participate are able to raise and spend private money for their campaigns, as they do today.

Qualification – To qualify into the system, candidates must demonstrate that they are credible candidates with grassroots support. This is done by collecting a prescribed number of signatures and \$5 qualifying contributions from registered voters in their district. To cover minor costs during the qualifying period, candidates are permitted to raise a limited amount of seed money from private sources in amounts not exceeding \$100 per contributor.

Primary funding -- Candidates who successfully qualify for Fair Elections funds and agree not to raise or spend private money during the primary and general election campaign periods receive a set amount of money from the Fair Elections fund.

General election funding -- Candidates who win their party primaries and qualifying independent candidates who agree to the voluntary restrictions receive a set amount of general election funding from the Fair Elections fund.

Non-participating candidates and independent expenditures -- In order to maintain a financially level playing field, Fair Elections candidates who are outspent by privately financed opponents, or targeted by independent expenditures, are entitled to a limited amount of matching funds.