

August 16, 2019

Governor Cuomo

Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins

Speaker Heastie

Members of the Public Financing of Elections Commission

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leaders Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, and Members of the Public Financing of Elections Commission:

Our New York Indivisible groups submit the below recommendations for both for the Public Financing of Elections Commission process and final policy determinations. Indivisible is a movement of thousands of local activist groups and more than a million members nationwide taking regular, iterative, and increasingly complex actions to resist the GOP agenda, elect local champions, and fight for progressive policies.

Democracy reform is a top priority for New York Indivisible activists, and as grassroots leaders, we know democracy reform means more than voting reform; in addition to increasing voting access, we must increase the power of small dollar donations and limit the influence of big money in elections. By matching small dollar donations 6-to-1, we can amplify the voices of women; of people of color; of the working and middle classes; and of any and all under-represented New Yorkers in the political process.

Although we are disappointed that the Legislature was not able to deliver a public financing system through the budget, we are now looking to the Public Financing of Elections Commission to deliver a strong result for our state. We are pleased that the Commission has been seated. We now look forward to working together to create a strong system for New Yorkers, and a public financing model for the nation. We are in full agreement with the following recommendations of the Fair Elections campaign and other advocates:

#### Public Financing of Elections Commission Process

The Public Financing of Elections Commission should be independent in its deliberations, be transparent, rely on public financing experts and public testimony, and provide ample opportunity for meaningful public input. Specifically, the Commission should:

### *On Independence & Reliance on Experts*

- Rely on public financing experts and public testimony to craft its recommendations consistent with the statutory goals of “incentivizing candidates to solicit small contributions, reducing the pressure on candidates to spend inordinate amounts of time raising large contributions for their campaigns, and encouraging qualified candidates to run for office.”
- Be provided sufficient budget to independently hire staff; conduct hearings and deliberations; draft and publish reports and other materials; communicate with the public; and otherwise operate effectively in order to fulfill its mandate.

### *On Transparency*

- Issue an interim report no later than September 30 (final is due under the law by December 1) to update the public on Commission progress.
- Host a web page and post online all meeting minutes, as well as testimony and materials submitted to the Commission.
- Hold public meetings, including via webcast.

### *On Providing Opportunities for Meaningful Input*

- Hold four hearings, as the law allows, rather than just the one that the law requires. We recommend New York City, Albany, Syracuse, and one online hearing (e.g., via Facebook Live), which allows Indivisible activists and the general public to participate and interact with the Commission in real-time.
- Provide a link on the Commission webpage to enable the public to submit comments digitally.

### Critical Final Policy Guideposts

Strong final Commission recommendations should focus solely on creating a successful public financing program and relevant campaign finance reforms that encourage broad participation. The following expert-back priorities have been proven essential and must be included:

- Provide at least a 6-to-1 match on small donations, to ensure that participating candidates are able to raise significant sums from small donors.

- Set qualifying thresholds that are attainable by viable candidates with community support but avoid wasting public funds on frivolous candidates.
- Require participating candidates to agree to lower contribution limits that incentivize fundraising from small donors but are not so low that participating candidates are unable to compete with non-participating candidates.
- Set lower contribution limits for non-participating candidates, so that the gap between participants and non-participants is not so large as to discourage participation in public financing.
- Set a cap on public funds that can be used for each office at amounts adequate to enable competitive campaigns but not so high as to risk depleting the state's reserves.
- Establish a candidate services and oversight unit separate from the State Board of Elections -- one that will guard against fraud but will also support candidates and not be overly punitive.
- Cover all statewide, state legislative, and district attorney races, for both primary and general elections.

HR 1, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives with every single Democrat in support, should be a shining example. While the Senate continues to obstruct democracy reform on the federal level, New York can lead the way with a robust public financing system to empower small donors.

Sincerely,

Adirondacks Indivisible  
 American Muslims Indivisible  
 BethlehemNYIndivisible  
 BlueBlast!  
 Brooklyn Resisters  
 CCoHOPE INDIVISIBLE  
 CD17Indivisible  
 Change Through Action  
 Chenango Change  
 Citizens' Response Network Of  
 Wayne County  
 Dedicated to Democracy

Empire State Indivisible  
 Hudson Valley Strong Indivisible  
 Indivisible Brooklyn  
 Indivisible 10591  
 Indivisible 518: Justice for All  
 Indivisible Activate NYC  
 Indivisible Binghamton  
 Indivisible Cayuga  
 Indivisible CD19 NY  
 Indivisible Cortland County  
 Indivisible Harlem  
 Indivisible LarchForward

Indivisible Long Beach  
Indivisible Madison County CD22  
Indivisible Mohawk Valley  
Indivisible Nation BK  
Indivisible New Rochelle  
Indivisible NY24  
Indivisible of RVC  
Indivisible Pawling  
Indivisible Pleasantville  
Indivisible Rivertowns  
Indivisible Rochester  
Indivisible Salt City  
Indivisible Scarsdale  
Indivisible Stephentown  
Indivisible Ulster  
Indivisible Upper East Side  
Indivisible Westchester  
Indivisible Westchester Districts  
6&7  
Let's Visit Lee Zeldin  
LINC  
Madison Chenango Call To Action  
Mountain Top Progressives  
NE Queens Indivisible  
Northern Westchester Indivisible  
NY 21 South Indivisible Group  
NY Indivisible  
NY-02 District Democrats  
NY19Votes  
Oblong Valley Indivisible  
One Queens Indivisible  
Progressive Schenectady  
Putnam Progressives  
Saratoga Progressive Action  
Stronger Together WNY  
Suffolk County Progressives  
To Do List Indivisible  
U-ACT (ULSTER ACTIVISTS)  
We Are One Sullivan

We the People of Oswego  
Indivisible