

November 12, 2019

Dear Commissioners,

The undersigned are local grassroots groups across New York State that advocate for good government. We respectfully submit this written testimony in order to offer our views on the Commission's areas of responsibility: Public Finance of Elections; Fusion voting; and Party Qualifications.

Summary

On Public Finance, we favor enactment of a robust system, and note the details we think especially important below.

On Fusion, we believe that the Commission should not ban or undermine the Fusion voting system in any way.

On Party Qualification, we oppose any new rules on Party Qualifications. There should be no increase in the "threshold" vote requirement for ballot status.

Details

This Commission, as named, was formed in response to an outcry around big money in politics, whereas there is no public demand to ban or weaken fusion voting and it is insincere at best to view fusion voting as related to campaign finance reform. In fact, this Commission should stay focused on establishing a public financing program. Additionally, the media has suggested that the Commission has been politicized so any move against fusion voting or third parties will be perceived in that way. .

As for the campaign finance reform program, the donor class is not representative of the diversity in our state and it overwhelmingly represents industry interests. During the last election cycle, a mere 100 donors gave more to state candidates than all of the estimated 137,0000 small donors* combined (*those contributing \$175 or less) according to the Brennan Center for Justice. .

The state budget charged the Commission with making recommendations "in furtherance of the 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." We firmly advocate for a public financing system that:

- Is a **permanent program** that starts **January 2022**
- Covers **primary and general elections**
- Includes at least a **6-to-1 match** on small donations **made not only by in-district but also in-state donors**
- Significantly **lower contribution limits** for all candidates, to be no higher than the federal limits
- Ensures **qualifying thresholds** enable incumbents and challengers with grassroots support to participate
- Creates an **independent enforcement agency** that oversees campaign finance law for all candidates

Strong campaign finance reform has strong public support - here are some recent examples:

- A 2019 survey found that 78 percent of New Yorkers voters supported creating a small dollar matching system in the state budget, while majorities said they were less likely to support

legislators and the Governor if they did not pass public financing in the state budget. (Public Policy Polling, March 2019)¹

- A 2018 survey found that 90 percent of voters surveyed in swing districts nationwide including in New York's 11th congressional district covering Staten Island and part of Brooklyn and the 19th and 22nd congressional districts in upstate New York are more likely to support candidates who back plans to create a small donor matching system. (Global Strategy Group, August 2018)²
- A 2013 survey found 97 percent of New York voters say it is important for state leaders to address "reducing the influence of money in politics and ending corruption." Sixty-five percent support and 23 percent oppose "creating a system of public campaign financing in New York that would limit the size of political contributions to candidates for state office and provide public money to candidates to match those smaller contributions." (Global Strategy Group/Mercury, May 2013)³

With 2 weeks before the Commission's deadline to release their recommendations, we have some deep concerns:

- Formed on July 3rd, the Commission has had only one working meeting on October 14th and only one more has been scheduled for November 13th. This early inaction has created an unnecessary urgency to do the deliberate, evidence-based work the public financing program requires.
- The lack of any plan or commitment to release an interim report.
- The Commission's inability to make forward progress. For example, on October 22nd, the commission flip-flopped, reversing a vote a week earlier, to now prohibit out-of-district matching contributions <https://www.nystateofpolitics.com/2019/10/campaign-finance-commission-reverses-itself/>, and raising irrelevant issues such as opportunities to ballot which takes the focus off the work at hand.

Conclusion

We look to you to now expedite the drafting the Commission's recommendations and release an interim report. We urge you to limit those recommendations to public campaign finance, and to leave the fusion voting and party qualification rules as they are. Doing otherwise threatens to undermine the credibility of the Commission. Many citizens already distrust government. Please do not give them another reason to feel that way by using the Commission in an overly politicized manner.

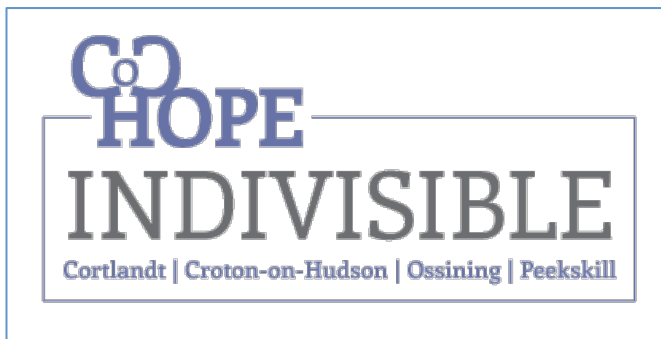
Sincerely,

Names of Organizations

¹ Public Policy Polling surveyed 625 New York voters on March 27-28, 2019. The margin of error is +/- 3.9%. <https://fairelectionsny.org/new-poll-shows-huge-support-statewide-for-public-financing-of-elections>

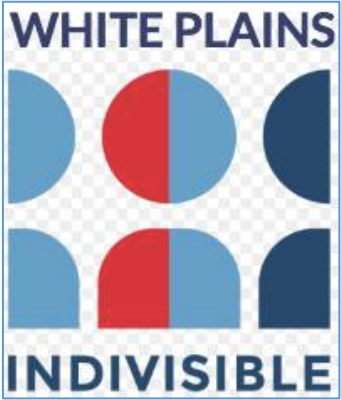
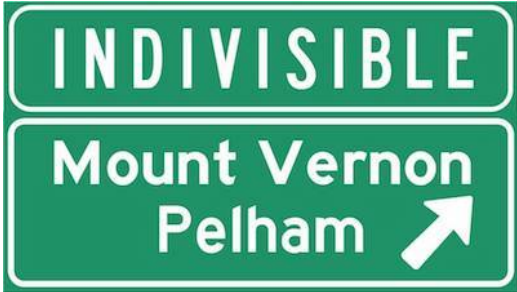
² Spectrum News, "Campaign Finance Reform Supporters Tout Swing District Polls," March 19, 2019, <https://www.nystateofpolitics.com/2019/03/campaign-finance-reform-supporters-tout-swing-district-polls/>

³ Global Strategy Group and Mercury surveyed 604 likely 2014 voters in New York from April 29 to May 1, 2013. The margin of error is +/- 4%. <http://fairelectionsny.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Memo-GSG-Mercury-2013.pdf>



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PROGRESSIVE WOMEN *of* PELHAM





Indivisible BlueBlast!
Indivisible Co-Op City
Bend the Arc Jewish Action, New York
Riverdale Huddle
New Paltz CD19