



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF CALIFORNIA

July 20, 2016

Chair Jodi Remke
Commissioner Maria Audero
Commissioner Eric Casher
Commissioner Gavin Wasserman
Commissioner Patricia Wynne
Fair Political Practices Commission
428 J Street, Suite 620
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 2523 (Mullin)—Request SUPPORT
July 2016 Agenda Item 55**

Dear Chair Remke and Commissioners:

The League of Women Voters of California supports AB 2523 (Mullin), which establishes a standard limit (currently \$4,200) for contributions to candidates running for local elected office in jurisdictions that have not adopted their own contribution limits. We urge the FPPC to adopt a stance of “Support” or “Support if Amended” on this bill instead of the staff recommendation of “Neutral if Amended.”

As you are aware, while existing law allows California counties, cities, and districts to limit campaign contributions, considerably fewer than a third do so. Around three-quarters of California cities and two-thirds of California counties have no contribution limits. In these jurisdictions, literally any amount can be given to a candidate. In such jurisdictions there are numerous examples of candidates receiving very large contributions that in some cases account for nearly all of their campaign war chest. In fact, at the end of May the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a county supervisorial candidate receiving an astounding \$200,000 direct contribution.¹

Contributions of this magnitude damage the public’s trust in the democratic process by deepening the perception or the possibility that candidates will be more responsive to their financial backers than their constituents. The very first declaration of the Political Reform Act (PRA) says that “State and local government should serve the needs and respond to the wishes of all citizens equally, without regard to their wealth.” (Gov. Code Sec. 81001(a).) That statement remains as true today as it did when it was adopted.

AB 2523 would impose a \$4,200 default limit on campaign contributions at the local level in those jurisdictions that have not adopted their own limits. The bill would stop most large contributions, while respecting local autonomy to craft limits more tailored to that jurisdiction. Assembly Member Mullin has worked closely with good government advocates and local governments in crafting a balanced bill, and accordingly, the League

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of California Cities, California State Association of Counties, and the California Special Districts Association are all neutral on the bill.

In our work on campaign finance issues, the League of Women Voters is guided by the belief that the methods of financing political campaigns should enhance political equality for all citizens, ensure transparency and the public's right to know who is using money to influence elections, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete equitably for public office, and allow maximum citizen participation in the political process. We believe that limiting the size of contributions strengthens our representative democracy and curbs potential corruption and undue influence.

At its last meeting, while many Commissioners stated their personal support for contribution limits, the Commission voted to take an "Oppose unless Amended" position on the bill, citing most prominently the facts that the bill amended the Elections Code as opposed to the PRA and vested enforcement with the district attorneys instead of the Commission. The bill was amended on June 14 in response to those concerns. Working with Commission staff and the Elections Committee, the author has also submitted to the Senate Appropriations Committee some technical clean-up amendments which we believe address all concerns with the bill.

With the amendments that have been taken, we ask the Commission to go a step further than the staff recommendation and adopt a "Support" or "Support if Amended" position. Contribution limits are at the heart of the Political Reform Act's mission to ensure that elected officials are responsive to the needs of their constituents over special interests. Like many individual Commissioners, we believe this is a reform that needs to be extended down to the local level. The Commission's endorsement would be powerful as AB 2523 moves to the Senate floor, where a supermajority vote will be required.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Helen L. Hutchison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a distinct dot above the 'i' in Hutchison.

Helen L. Hutchison
President

cc: Assembly Member Kevin Mullin

ⁱ Kaitlyn Landgraf and Ana Santos, "In California, varied election filing practices reveal a system struggling to catch up," Los Angeles Times (May 30, 2016), available at: www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-campaign-finance-records-stanford-university-20160530-snap-story.html