

August 13, 2018

Honorable Chair Germond and Commissioners
Fair Political Practices Commission
1102 Q Street, Suite 3000
Sacramento CA 95811

Re: AB 84 (Mullin) – Political Reform Act changes – OPPOSE

Dear Chair Germond and Commissioners:

I am writing in opposition to AB 84, a bill to amend the Political Reform Act to allow legislative leadership committees to directly raise and spend huge contributions from political donors.

CALPIRG has long opposed campaign contribution limits that are out of reach for ordinary Californians, and supported reforms to encourage political fundraising from small donors instead. Our democracy is supposed to be based on the principle of one person, one vote. When campaign funding is dominated by big money, we end up with a system that is closer to one dollar equaling one vote.

Our primary concern is that AB 84 would open up new and more direct avenues for extremely wealthy and corporate interests to give large contributions and exert their influence over the political process. California's \$4,400 campaign contribution limits for legislative candidates are already absurdly out of reach compared to what most Californians could afford to give to the candidate of their choice. Under this bill, individual donors could give up to \$36,500 to each new legislative caucus committee to spend on legislative races – that amount is more than half the median annual income of a household in California.¹ We believe AB 84 will result in an increase in total contributions from extremely wealthy and corporate donations into the political process.

We are very concerned that allowing individual donors to give these large sums of money directly to committees controlled by sitting legislators will further benefit incumbents and increase wealthy donors' access and influence over policymaking. The purpose of the Political Reform Act is largely to prevent corruption of the political process, especially by wealthy individuals and organizations, and to abolish laws and practices that unfairly favor incumbents. This bill contradicts that purpose.

We understand that this bill is intended, in part, to counter the potential influence of independent expenditures. We strongly opposed the Supreme Court decisions that opened the floodgates for enormous independent expenditures, and we would love to see those decisions reversed. However, we do not believe that this bill is an appropriate response. One of our concerns is that the perception of corruption is higher when big donors give directly to legislators' campaigns,

¹ <http://time.com/money/5177566/average-income-every-state-real-value/>

and that perception of corruption is already eroding public trust in government. The Pew Research Center did a poll a few years ago that asked an open ended question: “What is the biggest problem with elected officials in Washington?” and the influence of special interest money on elected officials topped the list of named problems.² While the question was about Washington, we believe the sentiment could easily apply to Sacramento, and we want to work with the legislature to enhance trust in government and their elected leaders, not erode it.

Finally, we see no need for the urgency clause in this bill, or how quickly it’s being moved through the legislative process this August. We urge you to put the brakes on this bill. The consequences to our democracy are too significant to be rushed through.

Sincerely,



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² <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/6-perceptions-of-elected-officials-and-the-role-of-money-in-politics/>