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Subject: Comments/testimony for June 29th Commission meeting
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Testimony

To: Judge Foley and Commission Members

Today, June 29th the Commission To Improve Standards Of Conduct (CISC) is scheduled to discuss recommendations on campaign finance reform.

Please accept the below in the positive spirit in which it is intended. Please also know that I am personally very grateful and appreciative of the work and commitment you each are making via your service on this commission.

Do we need more evidence of the need? We have elected officials and big money campaign donors under indictment. We have two state legislators who have pleaded guilty to accepting bribes. We have obscenely high campaign account balances, approaching \$1million held by some legislators. And we have as a regular occurrence legislators fundraising directly from special interests poised to benefit from the votes of those same legislators.

My hope is that the CISC will embrace and recommend to the incoming 2023 legislature and to our new governor all 5 of the below reforms:

***The full public funding for all State and County elections in Hawaii.**

***Banning the solicitation or acceptance of campaign donations during the legislative session.**

***Reducing the cap on campaign donations** from from \$6,000, \$4,000 and \$2,000 to \$100, \$100, and \$100. Montana caps their maximum donation for state legislative races at \$180 per election.

***Banning contributions from corporations and unions** as 21 other states now do.

***Limit candidate campaign war chests.** This is done in Alaska where candidates can only carry forward a small portion of their campaign account from one election to the next. This law was upheld by the Alaska Supreme Court which noted that when a candidate who is unopposed raises money and squirrels it away for a future election, they are effectively circumventing donation limits for that future election.

All 5 are important, but the reform that makes all other reforms possible is the public funding of elections. Ban and limit big money special interests and replace it with public funds to be used to elect public servants beholden only to the public.

The State of Maine has such a program and it has proven to be a huge success.

Essentially, candidates for public office in Maine who wish to participate in the program must gather X number of signatures and \$5 donations, which qualifies them then for public funding sufficient to run a credible campaign. The number of signatures and \$5 donations is intended to prove the candidate is legitimate and varies depending on the race (gubernatorial, state senate or house, or county/city positions).

According to the National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL): “Today, 14 states provide some form of public financing option for campaigns...The two main types of programs states offer for public financing of elections are the [clean elections programs](#) offered in states such as Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut, and programs that provide a candidate with [matching funds](#) for each qualifying contribution they receive. The “clean election states” offer full funding for the campaign, and the matching funds programs provide a candidate with a portion of the funds needed to run the campaign.”

Hawaii presently has a program that provides some matching funds. While this program is utilized by some candidates in some races, it is significantly underutilized, underfunded, and in general falls far short of the Maine “Clean Elections” model.

In Maine, over 60% of all legislators and 75% of democratic legislators participate in this program. In the Connecticut 2014 elections, both the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor and [all the winning candidates for the six major statewide offices](#) used their public funding system, as did 83.4% of the candidates from both parties who won seats in the state senate and the general assembly.

Arizona’s Clean Election system is largely financed by special surcharges on legal fines or penalties, such as parking tickets, speeding tickets and other civil law violations. Connecticut’s Clean Elections program avoids using taxpayer funding by deriving its money from general state revenues generated by abandoned property and unclaimed financial accounts. Maine funds its program through a general budget appropriation.

There is no question that special interest money has a corrupting influence on politics and government. There is no question that those entities who have the ability to supply the money have a significantly greater amount of influence on government policy makers.

The Commission To Improve Standards Of Conduct (CISC) is in a position to greatly influence the future of democracy in Hawaii. I implore upon you to send a strong message to the Hawaii State Legislature in support of Clean Elections and the full and robust public funding of elections - at both the state and county levels.

Sincerely,
Gary Hooser
Former Hawaii State Senator

<https://reclaimtheamericandream.org/success-public/>

<https://reclaimtheamericandream.org/progress-public/>

https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Elections/Contribution_Limits_to_Candidates_2020_2021.pdf

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/12/04/opinion/disarming-campaign-war-chests/>

