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at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing

Concerning Local Government

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We at ESI support the statewide public financing program in the FY 2022-2023 budget. The small donor public financing program, enacted by the New York State Legislature in 2020 and to be administered by the Public Campaign Finance Board at the State Board of Elections, is set to launch November 9, 2022, for the 2024 legislative elections.

My ESI colleagues and I support the allocation of \$10.53 million for the administration of the program and appreciate the \$10 million proposed for future matching funds, as laid out in Governor Hochul's executive budget. However, we encourage the Assembly and Senate to increase the appropriation for future matching funds to \$40 million, to line up with the projected costs of the first legislative cycle of the program.

To be successful, the program must not be at risk of a funding shortfall. In order to build confidence in the program for both candidates and voters, it is imperative that this year's budget provide sufficient funds for the program's administration and for future matching funds.

ESI and others fought for a public financing program because this brings us closer to a true multiracial democracy... and to a democracy that works for all residents regardless of income levels. If properly implemented (with the right-level funding), it allows citizens from all walks of life to run and win elections without relying on those who can write big checks. Together with voting reforms, this policy brings more people into the democratic process.

Large corporate contributors are still spending huge sums on our state elections and, as long as we allow that (or leave candidates with no choice but to turn to such donors), corporate interests will exercise disproportionate influence over our state's political process.

We find that corporate and other special interest donors don't have concerns that dovetail with what New York's communities most need, including affordable housing, real clean energy and climate solutions, good paying jobs, health care for all, consumer protections or ending police violence and mass incarceration.

All of which is to say, once again, we New Yorkers — via our representatives in Albany — must fully fund this program now in order to protect and upgrade our democracy for the long term. My ESI colleagues and I urge the legislature to increase the funding for future matching funds to \$40 million.

Thank you for taking these points into consideration and acting to carry our democracy forward — and even making New York a model for other states.

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