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February 7th, 2019

Public Citizen submits this testimony on behalf of our more than 30,000 members and supporters in New York in strong support of Fair Elections, including enacting public financing of elections, in the SFY 2019-20 Budget.

Testimony by Jonah Minkoff-Zern, Campaign Director, Democracy Is For People Campaign as read by Ajit Bhullar, Fellow

At Public Citizen we are the people’s lobbyists. We fight to prioritize democracy reform and to resist the large corporations that seek to cut corners and gain an unfair advantage.

A hundred individuals spent more on elections in New York in 2018 than 137,000 small donors combined.

It is critical that we implement a small-donor matching system for state elections, like the successful programs in New York City and Connecticut. By matching small-dollar donations 6-to-1, we can amplify the voices of women, of people of color, of the working and middle classes, and of any and all underrepresented New Yorkers in the political process. Adequate enforcement as well as robust candidate support services would ensure the matching funds program runs smoothly.

On a national level, Donald Trump’s presidency represents both a crisis in our democracy and a chance to respond and build something better. In response to calls for change, the new U.S. House of Representatives leadership has prioritized the passage of sweeping democracy reforms in H.R. 1, the For the People Act.

New York – the third most populous state in the nation – mirrors how our national effort could look in the future. New York launched the year under new state Senate leadership by passing democracy reforms that you have been passing in the Assembly for decades, including early voting and limiting the LLC loophole. Yet, there are key reforms that we can still win this year that could be game changers in New York and help to set the stage for national reforms in the future.

To tackle the crisis we face in housing, living wage jobs, criminal justice, affordable health care, transportation, climate, fair taxes and more, we must transform a campaign finance system that advantages the interests of the wealthy few over those of the many.

The Fair Elections for New York campaign is demanding once and for all that we significantly reduce the power of big money in our politics and bring the people back in.



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Let's not miss this rare opportunity to make our government work for all New Yorkers. By raising the voices of everyday New Yorkers, we can ensure we can win victories on all the other issues we care most about.

This is a small expenditure that won't go into effect until 2020. It is estimated at \$50 million – well less than one-tenth of a percent of the state's \$176 billion budget – but the implications on a state and national level are enormous. It is a small price to pay to ensure a healthy democracy and a government that both works for the people and one that people perceive as working for us.

This is important because it brings our democracy back to where it belongs: the people. Our government officials should represent the people and not just the select few that contribute significantly to them. By prioritizing small-donor matching funds, we will send this message loud and clear that everyone will have a voice and ultimately restore public trust in their government.

Passing Fair Elections in New York will send ripples around our nation and help set the national stage for victories for our democracy in other states and ultimately in the halls of Congress.

