



Written Testimony

**Christina Harvey
Executive Director
Stand Up America**

**Submitted to the New York State Legislature
at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Concerning Local Government**

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of funding and implementing New York's statewide public financing program, enacted by this legislature in 2020, in the FY 2022-2023 budget. Stand Up America is dedicated to policies that amplify the voices of everyday New Yorkers in our politics, and we have been working alongside other grassroots groups in the Fair Elections for New York coalition since 2018.

The small-donor public financing program, 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. We support the inclusion of \$10.53 million for the administration of the program and \$10 million for future matching funds in Governor Hochul's executive budget. We encourage the Assembly and Senate to increase the appropriation for future matching funds to \$40 million, in line with the projected costs of the first legislative cycle of the program.

We come to you with the support of your constituents behind us. When statewide public financing was pending before the legislature, Stand Up America's New York members made over 1,500 calls to their legislators and submitted over 180 letters to the editor urging you to pass campaign finance reform legislation in New York. When the matter was later pending before a commission, our New York members sent over 6,000 emails to the commission in favor of the recommendations that eventually became law. Now is the time to fulfill the promise of that achievement.

I can not overstate the importance of the statewide public financing program receiving adequate funding for both administration and future matching funds this year to build confidence in the program for both candidates and voters. Your constituents and our members fought so hard for this law because:

- The current system gives large corporate contributors and the super-wealthy an outsized voice in our politics, and that means the voices of everyday New Yorkers are silenced.
- Public financing is key to fostering a multiracial democracy. It makes it possible for people from all walks of life to run and win their campaigns, without needing to know or depend on people who can write big checks. Together with policies to protect and expand the freedom to vote, this policy brings more people into the democratic process.
- The weight and influence of corporate and special interest donations and those of their lobbying firms are at odds with the solutions our communities need – whether it's tenants' rights and affordable housing, real clean energy and climate solutions, good paying jobs, health care for all, consumer protections or ending police violence and mass incarceration.

Additionally, it is my personal experience that the current system—which precipitates the need to relentlessly fundraise—severely curtails the ability of current elected officials to do the job which they want to do and their constituents have elected them to do. As someone who spent more than fifteen years as a senior aide to New York State elected officials, including in the state legislature and Attorney General's office, I saw the hours that must be spent every day in call time and other fundraising activities. Those hours mean less time for constituent meetings and events, and legislative and legal work. I also saw how fundraising is always the very last thing an elected official wants to be doing, and how eager many are to find excuses to skip fundraising activities so that they can continue doing the work of their office. You as elected officials should not have to make that choice

The passage of groundbreaking campaign finance legislation promises not only to limit the influence of money in our politics, and therefore bring us closer toward the promise of a democracy that represents all New York, but it also promises some respite for you as state elected officials from this cycle of daily begging that you find you find yourselves trapped in. But it can only function if you fully fund it. Funding this program now is an investment in our democracy's future. We commend the budget lines in the executive budget for the Public Campaign Finance Board and urge the legislature to increase the funding for future matching funds to \$40 million. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in support of this reform.