

**Written Testimony of Danielle Brecker
Co-Lead Organizer Empire State Indivisible
Democratic State Committee Member AD-36**

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

February 15, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of fully funding the new statewide Public Campaign Finance Program, enacted by the legislature in 2020, in the FY 2024 budget.

Part of the Indivisible movement, Empire State Indivisible works to hold our elected leaders to account and engage New Yorkers in civic life. With my written testimony today I am asking the New York State Executive and Legislature to be accountable to the people of New York State and fund the statewide Public Campaign Finance Program. This program will help us elected State lawmakers who will uniquely understand that they are accountable to the people and not big moneyed donors.

Empire State Indivisible is dedicated to policies that amplify the voices of everyday New Yorkers in our politics. We have been working alongside other grassroots groups in the Fair Elections for New York coalition since 2018 to advance small donor public financing in New York State.

Recently, Empire State Indivisible has been engaged in conversations with New Yorkers about the need to reimagine New York State's taxation policy to be progressive not regressive and to end tax breaks to the wealthiest New Yorkers and New York corporations. In these conversations, many New Yorkers, people we have just met, pointed out the direct link between public campaign financing and enacting policies that put people first by investing in our communities.

The small donor public financing program, administered by the Public Campaign Finance Board (PCFB) at the State Board of Elections, launched on November 9, 2022. The 2024 legislative elections will be its first cycle. The PCFB requested \$14.5 million for the program's administration and \$100 million for matching funds in its FY2024 budget request.

We appreciate the executive budget's appropriation of \$14.5 million for the agency's implementation and administration costs. However, the partial allocation of \$25 million

for matching funds is far less than what is required to establish a robust program and instill public confidence in it. We encourage the Senate and Assembly to increase the appropriation for matching funds to the full \$100 million requested by the PCFB.

It is essential that the PCFB receives adequate funding for both administration and future matching funds this year to help the program reach its full potential. Full funding will enable the agency to build candidate and voter confidence in the program's solvency. It will also assure campaigns that they can plan their fundraising strategies around collecting small contributions from constituents instead of large donors.

The potential benefits of this program cannot be overstated. We fought so hard for this law because

- Public campaign financing amplifies community support for candidates. It makes it possible for folks from all walks of life to run and win their campaigns without needing to know or depend on people who can write big checks. Lowering the financial barriers to running successful campaigns is especially meaningful for voters who historically have faced obstacles in private wealth-based politics, including women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and low-income individuals. Combined with voting reforms, this public policy brings more people into the democratic process.
- Large corporate contributors continue to spend huge sums on state elections, translating into disproportionate influence on our political process. Those contributors' voices and opinions, and those of their lobbying firms, are often at odds with the solutions our communities need. These differences exist in tenants' rights and affordable housing, real clean energy and climate solutions, good paying jobs, health care for all, public education, consumer protections, regulation of technology companies, democracy reform, civil rights, or ending police violence and mass incarceration.

We commend the budget lines in the executive budget for the PCFB's administrative costs and urge the legislature to increase the funding for future matching funds to \$100 million as requested by the PCFB.

Funding this program now is an investment in our democracy's future at a time when many other states are retracting voting rights and severely limiting our democracy and democratic process.

Thank you.