



**Written Testimony**

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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 in the FY 2023-2024 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.

New Yorkers deserve a state government that represents all of us — where candidates and elected officials can focus on what our communities need, not what big-money donors and special interests want. The small donor public financing program promises to bring us one step closer to that goal, but only if it is adequately funded.

The public financing program, the first statewide program of its kind in the country, was enacted by this legislature in 2020 and launched on November 9, 2022. The Public Campaign Finance Board (PCFB) at the State Board of Elections, which is responsible for administering the program, has 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 Assembly and Senate 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.

Until now, candidates' dependence on large contributions to run a competitive campaign in New York State has given corporations and the super-wealthy an outsized role in shaping policy, and diminished the voices of everyday citizens. It has also locked many qualified candidates out of elected office – especially women, minority, and low-income candidates, who may not have access to donors with deep pockets.

While these problems aren't unique to the Empire State, the extreme concentration of wealth here has practically erased the influence of small-dollar donors in state elections. New York state's new system addresses this by empowering ordinary voters and making it easier for candidates from all walks of life to run and win.

Matching small-dollar donations also helps to ensure that candidates spend more time listening to working people, not asking wealthy donors or corporate lobbyists for campaign funds. I should know — I spent more than 15 years as a senior aide to New York State elected officials, including in the state legislature and Attorney General's office. Between dialing for dollars and shuttling to and from fundraisers and donor meetings, elected officials often spend 25% of their time or more fundraising for reelection. This means less time listening to constituents and less time for important legislative and legal work.

No one gets into public service in hopes of spending a quarter of their time soliciting campaign donations. In fact, it's often the last thing elected officials want to be doing. Our leaders shouldn't be forced to choose between doing their jobs and keeping them. New York's small-dollar matching system liberates them from the demands of fundraising, so that they can serve our communities more effectively.

We've seen the alternative. Time and time again, progress has been stalled by megadonors whose interests are at odds with those of ordinary citizens.

If we want to see change on any of the issues we care about — like affordable housing, community safety, and quality schools — New Yorkers need a state government that isn't beholden to special interests. That's why Stand Up America members in New York made more than 1,500 calls and sent over 6,000 emails in support of passing a small-dollar matching program and lowering contribution limits in 2019 and 2020.

For our state to live up to the promise of a democracy that represents everyone, everyday New Yorkers must have the ears of their elected officials and elected officials must have time to dedicate to the business of government.

As the 2024 election cycle kicks off, Stand Up America will continue to encourage candidates for state offices to use our new public financing system, and we are counting on the legislature to ensure that system is fully funded.

Thank you for your time.