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**Written Testimony of Jonah Minkoff-Zern
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**Submitted to the New York State Legislature
at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Concerning Local Government**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of full funding for the new statewide Public Campaign Finance Program, enacted by this legislature in 2020. Public Citizen, with more than 50,000 members and supporters in New York, 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.

The 2024 legislative elections will be the first cycle for the small donor public financing program. The Public Campaign Finance Board (PCFB) at the State Board of Elections, which administers this program, 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 program's administration costs. However, the allocation of just \$25 million for matching funds is significantly less than what is required to establish a functioning program and instill public confidence in it. We are calling on the Assembly and Senate to increase the appropriation for matching funds to the full \$100 million requested by the PCFB.

It is crucial that the PCFB receives adequate funding for both administration and future matching funds this year to help the program reach its full potential. Without full funding, the agency will not be able to produce candidate and voter confidence in the program's solvency. Full funding will assure campaigns that they can plan their fundraising strategies around collecting small contributions from constituents instead of large donors. With [public trust in government near historic lows](#), and with recent Pew Research polls showing that [Americans view reducing the influence of money in politics as a top 5 priority](#), this moment represents an extraordinary opportunity for New York to set an example nationwide. The potential benefits of this program cannot be overstated.

Fully funded small donor public financing programs are proven to be effective mechanisms for candidates and more inclusive for voters of all backgrounds. According to the Brennan Center, candidates throughout the country who have opted in to public financing programs have consistently managed to outraise and outspend candidates reliant on private wealthy donors, thus [enjoying more electoral success](#). New York's Attorney General Letitia James, who opted into the program before taking state office, said that she would not have been able to get to her current position without public financing.

The ability of public financing programs to make our democracy more inclusive for everyone is clear. From Berkeley, California to Washington, DC, these programs saw increased donor participation beyond just white wealthy zip codes, with more engagement from new donors, donors in zip codes with lower median incomes, and young people, people of color, and working people.

These programs not only lower the barrier to entry for voters, but also for candidates who are women, people of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and working class.

This dynamic is supported by [data from New York City](#), where recent elections saw women increase their representation on the city council from 27 percent to 61 percent, people of color, making up 68 percent of city residents, increase their representation from 51 percent to 67 percent, and women of color more than double their seats.

All the while, women and people of color who won seats or were competitive raised as much on average as their white male counterparts and relied on small donations and public matching funds to similar degrees.

With more voters and candidates from diverse backgrounds being involved in the electoral process, New York stands to benefit through a stronger democracy and, with more input from underrepresented communities, improved policy that better addresses constituents' needs.

Providing the full allocation for PCFB's matching funds would not only go a long way toward making campaigning more accessible, but also toward restoring much needed public confidence in the government's ability to do its job. As a result, progress on other critical issues will be more politically feasible with an inclusive election process and increased trust and support for government.

Fully funding this program now is a necessity for New York's success and our democracy's future. We commend the full funding 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. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this reform.