



**Testimony of Rev. West McNeill  
On Behalf of The Labor-Religion Coalition**

**Submitted to NYS Senate Finance & Assembly Ways & Means Committee Chairs  
For February 6th, 2024  
Joint Legislative Hearing on Local/General Government**

Dear Senate Finance Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways & Means Chair Weinstein, and members of the New York State Legislature:

I thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State. The Labor-Religion Coalition of New York State unites faith, labor, and community in a statewide movement for social, racial, and economic justice, grounded in our deeply held moral and democratic values. We are dedicated to policies that amplify the voices of everyday New Yorkers in our politics. That is why 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 Labor-Religion Coalition applauds the Executive Budget's commitment to fully funding the New York State Public Campaign Finance Program (PCFP) for FY 2024-25. It provides \$114.5 million for the program, including \$14.5 million for administrative costs and \$100 million for public matching funds. The governor's proposed budget will provide the funds needed to support the program's first run in the 2024 state legislative elections. We urge you to support this figure in your one-house budgets and ensure it is included in the final budget.

It is essential that the PCFP receives adequate funding for both administration and matching funds this year to help the program reach its full potential. It is the strongest reform enacted anywhere in the nation to counter the outsized influence of wealth in our politics. Full funding will enable the agency to ensure 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.

To date, over 200 candidates have enrolled in the program for the 2024 legislative elections – a clear sign of the program's popularity among voters and candidates alike. This number

continues to grow especially as we approach the February 26, 2024 deadline for candidates to opt in.

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, consumer protections, childcare, or ending police violence and mass incarceration.
- As an organization dedicated to social, racial, and economic justice and concerned about the imperiled state of democracy in this country, we feel that PCFP offers a concrete way for communities to get involved in the electoral process and ensure accountable representation.

In this pivotal political year and in the wake of continued assaults on our democracy, our elected leaders must ensure that the PCFP gets the resources it needs to build the inclusive, representative democracy New Yorkers demand and deserve.

As budget negotiations get underway, we call on Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie and the members of the Legislature to ensure that the state's final budget reflects the full \$114.5 million in the governor's proposed budget. This will help ensure that the program fulfills its promise to strengthen our democracy by elevating the voices of everyday New Yorkers in our political process. It represents an investment in a democracy that delivers on issues that matter to all New Yorkers – not just the wealthiest few – from housing and jobs to healthcare and education.

The Labor-Religion Coalition supports fully funding the Public Campaign Finance Program. Funding this program now is an investment in our democracy's future. We urge the Legislature to allocate \$114.5 million to the program as included in the FY 2024-25 Executive Budget. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the New York State Public Campaign Finance Program.