



Government of the District of Columbia Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B

RESOLUTION #4B-19-0507 Encouraging Candidates to Participate in Public Financing of Elections (Fair Elections) Adopted May 20, 2019

Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B takes note of the following:

- The DC Fair Elections Amendment Act of 2018 establishes a voluntary small-donor empowerment program for DC elections. The program provides limited public matching funds to qualified candidates that pledge to only accept small donations from DC residents and forgo corporate and Political Action Committee donations. The law strengthens local democracy by allowing candidates and elected officials to spend more time with their constituents and reining in the influence of big money in our elections.
- 10 Councilmembers (Phil Mendelson (Chair), Anita Bonds (At-Large), David Grosso (At-Large), Robert White (At-Large), Elissa Silverman (At-Large), Brianne Nadeau (Ward 1), Mary Cheh (Ward 3), Kenyan McDuffie (Ward 5), Charles Allen (Ward 6), and Trayon White (Ward 8)) co-sponsored or co-introduced the bill in March 2017. The bill passed unanimously in February 2018. Mayor Muriel Bowser was “moved by the[] passion” of DC residents who believe the Fair Elections Act would “strengthen our democracy” and signed the bill in March 2018, which became law in May 2018.
- To qualify for funds under the program, candidates for Mayor, Attorney General, DC Council, or the State Board of Education first have to raise a certain amount of money from small-dollar donors. Candidates then receive a base grant for their campaigns and are eligible for public funds at a 5-to-1 match. This means that \$50 from a DC resident would be matched with \$250 in public funds, for a total of \$300 in contributions to the candidate. The program caps how much public funding any candidate can receive based on a percentage of what candidates for that same position spent over the past two election cycles. See Martin Auster Muhle, *WAMU*, “Bowser Signs Bill Creating Public Financing Program for Political Campaigns – And Will Fund It” (Mar. 13, 2018).

- Under the current campaign finance system, more than 60% of campaign contributions in recent cycles come from either non-District residents or corporations, while only 5% of campaign contributions come from D.C. residents giving \$100 or less. DC’s donor class is older, whiter, wealthier, and more male than the District’s population as a whole. More than 62% of Council and Mayoral donors are white, compared to 37% of DC’s population. On the other hand, women make up nearly half of donors giving less than \$50, and people of color make up 47% of donors giving less than \$25. The Fair Elections Act aims to provide greater accountability and responsiveness by elected officials to DC residents, including people of color and low-income residents by encouraging and supporting their participation in the political process.
- When candidates spend their time fundraising from wealthy donors and big corporations, they are not hearing the concerns of everyday residents, who face day-to-day problems like skyrocketing rents and stagnant wages. Too often, the priorities of big developers and other special interests are reflected in local policy, rather than the needs and concerns of DC voters. Small donor empowerment is a proven solution, designed to amplify the voices of average people.
- Similar legislation in other jurisdictions has achieved positive results such as “[g]reater racial and class diversity among donors,” “[m]ore women running for office,” “[i]ncreased numbers of donors,” and “[m]ore quality time spent with constituents.” Juhem Navarro-Rivera and Emmanuel Caicedo, *Demos*, “Public Funding for Electoral Campaigns (June 28, 2017), available at <https://www.demos.org/research/public-funding-electoral-campaigns-how-27-states-counties-and-municipalities-empower-small>.
- As noted by Councilmember Charles Allen (Ward 6), “This law is going to help restore D.C. voters’ trust that their voice is what matters most to candidates for our local D.C. offices. This is great for elections in D.C.”
- Our democracy will benefit from broader participation in the fair elections program. DC residents can help ensure the success of the program by pledging to donate to candidates who participate in the program. Current elected officials who are running for office can demonstrate their support for the law and set a good example by opting into the fair elections program. Other potential candidates, who learn that an elected official is planning to participate in the fair elections program might follow their good example and participate in the program as well, recognizing the message that each and every citizen’s voice is heard.

RESOLVED:

- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B encourages members of the DC Council as elected officials and potential future candidates to participate in DC's public financing of elections program.
- That Advisory Neighborhood Commission 4B calls on the DC Council to work closely with the Office of Campaign Finance to ensure timely and effective implementation of the fair elections program for the 2020 election cycle.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the Commission designates Commissioner Erin Palmer, ANC 4B02, to represent the Commission in all matters relating to this resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

That, in the event the designated representative Commissioner cannot carry out their representative duties for any reason, the Commission authorizes the Chair to designate another Commissioner to represent the Commission in all matter relating to this resolution.

FURTHER RESOLVED:

Consistent with DC Code § 1-309, only actions of the full Commission voting in a properly noticed public meeting have standing and carry great weight. The actions, positions, and opinions of individual commissioners, insofar as they may be contradictory to or otherwise inconsistent with the expressed position of the full Commission in a properly adopted resolution or letter, have no standing and cannot be considered as in any way associated with the Commission.

ADOPTED by show of hands vote at a regular public meeting (notice of which was properly given, and at which a quorum of seven of nine members was present) on May 20, 2019, by a vote of 7 yes, 0 no, 0 abstain.