

MOTION

"Clean Money Elections for Los Angeles"

The influence of money in our political system casts a long, heavy shadow over our democracy. Candidates are forced to spend inordinate amounts of time seeking out donors instead of voters, creating a widespread perception of influence peddling and corruption, undermining the electorate's faith in candidates and elected officials, and discouraging voter participation.

Los Angeles has a long and strong tradition of campaign finance reform. It has a robust public matching funds system, tight contribution limits, strong disclosure and transparency requirements, and a prohibition of donations from lobbyists and fundraising by city commissioners. Yet even Los Angeles' strong system can be made stronger, increasing voter faith in the process.

In 2005, Councilmember Bill Rosendahl co-authored a motion (CF 05-1536) with then-Councilmembers Eric Garcetti and Wendy Greuel calling for a full public financing system for all elected offices in Los Angeles. That legislation was studied and debated, but no reforms were implemented and the Council File expired in 2011. In 2017, Councilmember Mike Bonin authored a motion (CF 17-0058) similarly calling for full public financing in Los Angeles. That motion did not advance and expired earlier this year. The need is as great as ever and must be revisited.

The concept of "Clean Money," as it has been called in jurisdictions such as Maine and Arizona, where such programs are in effect, is simple: a level playing field for all candidates created through a voluntary public financing system. Candidates demonstrate viability by collecting a certain number of low-dollar donations from a large number of constituents, agree to forgo corporate donations, special interest money, or significant self-financing, and in exchange receive a statutorily established amount of money sufficient to run an aggressive and well-financed campaign. Maine and Arizona both have successful versions of public financing that have: led to lowered overall campaign spending; freed candidates from fundraising; increased voter turnout; and encouraged more qualified people to run, including people of color and women.

Tremendous work has been done in recent years to educate the public about this issue, and to move toward a system of publicly-financed elections, including statewide efforts by organizations like "Money Out, Voters In" and the California Clean Money Campaign. The issue of money in elections at all levels of government has also been a major theme in presidential campaigns, particularly that of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, which ignited a movement of people throughout the country who want elections to be more fair and transparent.

With the demand to get money out of politics so strong, with the appetite for reform so prevalent, and with city elections scheduled to move to a new even-year cycle in 2020, the time has come to establish a "Clean Money" system of full public financing of Los Angeles municipal elections. Such a proposal could be enacted by the City Council or could be submitted to the voters.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Ethics Commission be requested to submit for Council consideration proposals for a Clean Money Public Campaign Financing System for all elected offices in the City of Los Angeles.

I FURTHER MOVE that the City Administrative Officer and Chief Legislative Analyst in consultation with the City Ethics Commission be directed to report with a cost estimate and options for financing a Clean Money Public Campaign Financing System for all elected offices in the City of Los Angeles, including potential dedicated funding streams for a Clean Money Public Campaign Financing System that do not impact the General Fund.

PRESENTED BY:



MIKE BONIN

Councilmember, 11th District

SECONDED BY:



ORIGINAL

DEC 06 2019