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Federal Judge Enjoins Connecticut's Public Financing Program

PRESS RELEASES

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Yesterday Judge Underhill ruled in Connecticut District Court that Connecticut's Clean Elections Program unconstitutionally burdens minority parties' rights to political opportunity and the Program's trigger provisions burden their First Amendment speech rights. This decision threatens to undo reforms made in wake of the many corruption scandals involving elected officials in state and local government that had earned the state the unfortunate nickname "Corrupticut."

"This decision by a single judge completely disregards binding constitutional precedent regarding public financing programs - which have been consistently upheld by the Supreme Court and other federal courts," says Monica Youn, lead counsel for the Intervenor-Defendants in the case.

"We are confident that the appellate courts will rectify this judge's mistake. We cannot allow a single judge's incorrect view of the First Amendment to pull Connecticut's state government back to the days of scandal and corruption that have so plagued this state," Youn continues.

Ironically, the judge's decision - under the guise of vindicating the First Amendment rights of minor party candidates - will actually take away the unprecedented political opportunities the CEP offers them. In the 2010 election, minor party candidates in 21 legislative districts were automatically eligible for CEP funding that would far exceed the amounts they have historically been able to raise. Judge Underhill's decision would take away minor party candidates' path to political viability.

The Citizens' Election Program was passed by the Connecticut General Assembly in December 2005, in the wake of the Gov. Rowland impeachment and other corruption scandals. The CEP was a crucial part of the state's effort to turn the tide of corruption that saw the resignation and imprisonment of former Governor Rowland.

The Citizens' Election Program provides full public financing to qualified candidates for legislative and statewide

offices in Connecticut. To participate, a candidate must abide by certain contribution and expenditure limits in return for a public grant.

In its first year of operation, more than three-quarters of General Assembly candidates participated in the Citizens' Election Program. Rather than relying on campaign contributions from a few large contributors and special interest groups, such candidates were beholden to the Connecticut electorate - to the many rather than the few.

Elected officials who participate in the Citizens' Election Program can cease the endless "dialing for dollars" that can occupy the majority of an official's time, and instead can devote their attention to their elected duties.

Tags: Democracy, Campaign Finance Reform

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