

Testimony of Mel Wymore, Candidate for City Council, on Campaign Finance Bill, April 27, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Introduction 1130-A, sponsored by Council Members Kallos, Lander, and Cabrera. I want to thank each of them for their leadership on this critical issue.

In the time of Trump, a time when our communities and families are increasingly under attack, encouraging civic participation is our single best recourse. There's nothing wrong with marches, rallies, and forums. But at the end of the day, the best and only answer is for people to run for office and win.

This is especially important for young people and minorities, voices we desperately need at all levels of elected government.

The good news is that we've seen an incredible outpouring of Americans of all stripes expressing interest in running for office. *Roll Call* recently reported that EMILY's List, which supports women running for office, has been contacted since the election by over 10,000 women interested in running - more than ten times the number they heard from in all of 2015 and 2016 combined.

The bad news is that running for office presents difficult barriers to entry, especially if you're not a well-connected, affluent person to begin with. And let's be honest, in most cases that means that unless you're a straight, white, and male, you have major built-in handicaps.

And the most important of these handicaps is money. Raising money for a campaign is difficult. It is time consuming. And it puts heavy pressure on those running for office to give in to pressure from big-money special interests who can help them compete.

Here in New York, I've seen this firsthand, as have each of you. The power of the real estate industry is the power of the purse. The ability to sway elections is something with which every New York politician has to grapple.

Today we have a state senate in Republican hands because a group of Democrats decided they needed to sell their souls to get elected. It comes down to money.

There's a fundamental principle at stake: in a democratic republic, running for office should be available to anyone. Our elected officials should be chosen based on their ideas and their values, not on their pocketbooks or their rolodexes or their willingness to bend to special interests.

I live and am running for office in a mostly-affluent neighborhood, the Upper West Side. But even with that base of potential donors, it takes effort to avoid donations from the real estate industry, which I've made it campaign policy to refuse. Wherever you go, there are potential donors with money and agendas. Trying to compete with small donations and organic support is the right thing to do, but let's be honest: it's a handicap.

Every minute spent trying to raise money is a minute where a candidate is less accessible to their voters. Every minute of fundraising is a minute where our candidates should be making themselves available and accessible to the people they want to represent.

The more the city can match, the more accessible elections become - both to would-be candidates and to voters.

Increasing public matching to a full match would go a long way to closing this gap and making campaigns more accessible to every New Yorker. I strongly support this bill. Thank you.