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Testimony – State Board of Elections

HB 260 - Chair, Government, Labor and Elections Committee (By Request – Departmental – State Board of Elections)

Public Financing Act – Fair Campaign Financing Fund – Distributions

Purposes:

- Align Fair Campaign Financing Fund distribution dates for Gubernatorial candidates with distribution dates for public financing programs for county candidates
- Enhance the feasibility and benefits of participating in the Fair Campaign Financing Fund program for Gubernatorial candidates

Comments:

The State Board of Elections supports this legislation.

This bill aligns distribution of public funds for certified and qualified candidates in both local and State public financing programs, allowing qualifying Gubernatorial campaigns to receive public financing distributions beginning on July 1 of the year before a Gubernatorial election. At present, Gubernatorial campaigns can begin receiving distributions in January of the election year. The bill would not change eligibility for the program, nor the period during which candidates could collect donations eligible for matching.

Established in 1974, the Fair Campaign Financing Fund is a voluntary public financing system for candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor. Updated and amended in 2021 by the Fair Elections Act of 2021, the program allows candidates for Governor and Lieutenant Governor to receive public funds for their campaigns if they can show that they have raised a certain amount of funds from a certain number of donors. Under State law, a gubernatorial ticket must raise at least \$120,000 from 1,500 eligible contributions in order to qualify. The current public financing program is modeled after county public financing programs.

While public financing programs permit gubernatorial and county campaigns alike to begin raising private contributions to qualify for public matching funds when the election cycle starts, Gubernatorial candidates currently have to wait up to six months longer than local campaigns to begin receiving distributions. The delay in access to public funding for Gubernatorial candidates could have a potential negative impact on participation in the program.

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