



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

HB 340 – Election Law – Campaign Finance – Enforcement

POSITION: Support

BY: Nancy Soreng President

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The League of Women Voters supports campaign finance regulations that enhance political equality for all citizens, ensure transparency, protect representative democracy from distortion by undisclosed contributions and combat corruption. However, if regulations are not enforceable because of statutes of limitations or insufficient penalties, they are powerless to create the kind of ethical, fair campaigns where all candidates play by the same rules.

HB 340 extends the statute of limitation for levying a penalty for campaign finance violations from three years to five years. It is not always possible to discover and investigate unethical/illegal campaign activity within a 3-year timeframe. It also prohibits anyone from becoming a campaign treasurer or candidate if in any of the 5 previous years they have failed to pay a civil penalty that was levied.

In addition, this bill raises the maximum penalty for violating certain campaign finance regulations from \$500 to \$1,000. If a person claims that they unwittingly violated campaign finance regulations, they are still obliged to pay a penalty but the state prosecutor shall inform them that they have the right to a trial in District Court. Fines for persons found to knowingly and willfully violate campaign finance regulations can be found guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction subject to a fine not exceeding \$25,000 or imprisonment not exceeding one year, or both.

This bill strengthens many penalties and procedures for holding campaigns accountable, therefore we urge a favorable report on HB 340.