



House Bill 2578: Small Donor-Funded Elections

The Problem

Our democracy is out of balance. Faith in elections is at an all-time low. Voter turnout is falling. And more and more everyday people feel like their voices are not heard.

One major problem is the high costs of running for office. Candidates are forced to spend more and more time raising money from a small group of donors. Aspiring lawmakers today need networks of wealthy donors to run for office. That makes it difficult for candidates to spend enough time engaging with voters in their communities.

The Solution

Small Donor-Funded Elections is our path forward. Under this reform, if a candidate agrees to only take small donations from individuals, their small donations are matched and amplified. This reform ensures that every Oregonian—regardless of their background—has a seat at the table and a voice in our democracy.

Small donor matching has been successful all across our country. New York City has had it for over thirty years, and Maine, Connecticut, Seattle, Albuquerque, Los Angeles, and Montgomery County Maryland have seen this reform work. Oregon could too.

The Impact

Small donor matching changes how candidates campaign. Because donations from ordinary people are amplified, candidates can spend more time campaigning in all neighborhoods. More people have a chance to connect with their lawmakers, and engagement and participation increases.

Small donor matching also allows for a more diverse pool of candidates. Big money is a barrier for candidates from low-income communities. But if we do not need networks of wealthy donors to run for office, people of all backgrounds can participate in our elections, and bring their perspectives to the conversation.

Small Donor-Funded Elections is how we engage more people, how we increase confidence in our elections, and how we make sure that every person has a voice in our democracy.

Our elections are dominated by big donors. But we can restore balance to our democracy. If we match small contributions from ordinary Oregonians, every person can have a voice in our community.

How Small Donor-Funded Elections Works

Candidates can opt-in to the program

- Candidates for Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Bureau of Labor and Industries, Treasurer, State Senate, State House, Judge, and District Attorney can opt-in to the program
- Candidates agree to only take small donations, and in exchange their donations from are matched six-to-one from the Small Donor Funded Elections Fund
- Small Donor-Funded Elections allows candidates to run competitive races without having to take large contributions

Candidates can raise enough money to win

- Candidates can take donations from individuals and organizations. Donations from individuals and organizations are capped at \$250/cycle.
- People's PACs can give unlimited amounts to candidates; as long the PAC only accepts small donations under \$250. This encourages grassroots activists to organize by pooling their donations.
- Candidates can take in-kind help from political parties to negotiate with vendors
- Candidates can use donations from any source, or personal funds, to help set up their campaigns. This "Seed Money" is capped at \$12,000 for statewide offices, \$6,000 for legislative offices, and \$3000 for judicial or district attorneys' offices

Candidates only qualify for the program if they have community support

- Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Treasurer, Labor Commissioner must raise small donations from 1,000 in-state individuals totaling \$25,000 to qualify
- Representatives and Senators must raise small donations from 500 in-state individuals totaling \$12,500 to qualify
- Supreme Court, Court of Appeals, District Attorneys must raise small donations from 250 in-state individuals totaling \$6,250 to qualify

This program would be fiscally responsible

- There's a limit for how much the Fund can give to a candidate, which is based on an average of the competitive races in the last election, and would be updated each cycle
- The limit applies to public funds only. There is no limit to privately raised funds.
- The limit helps keep the program within the budget, and controls the exploding costs of running for office

Candidates must use matching funds responsibly

- Participating candidates cannot pay campaign salaries to family members, and cannot purchase services from a company they own, or at a rate above fair market value
- Public funds can only be spent on legitimate campaign expenses. Privately raised contributions can be spent on any campaign expense legal under Oregon law. Spot checks and audits will ensure compliance. Unspent public funds must be returned.

Small Donor-Funded Elections can make democracy work for all of us. Join the many community-based advocates and support this reform for our state.