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Citizen Campaign Commission: First Report to City Council and the Citizens of Portland City Council Testimony April 26, 2007

The League enthusiastically supported Portland's Campaign Finance Fund and we are pleased to be here today to address the Citizens Campaign Commission's first report and recommendations. We appreciate the commission's work. They have taken their charge seriously and made some excellent recommendations. This program is a work in progress and will require constant evaluation and change as we experience new situations such as open seats and fall runoff races. Fortunately, the commission has shown that it is up to the task, and we are confident they will continue to monitor the system with great care.

For the most part we support the recommendations outlined in the report. The recommendations tightening the signature gathering requirements are essential and should prevent the type of incidents we experienced in 2006. The proposed signature form is a big improvement. It eliminates confusion with initiative petitions and makes clear who is eligible to contribute as well as the penalty for signing inappropriately. Furthermore, allowing candidates and campaign volunteers to register voters or provide registration cards for later submission maintains the focus on broadening participation and getting more citizens connected to and interested in voting and in their government.

Based on the information gathered by the commission, adjusting the qualifying period forward to include summer makes sense. We are concerned, however, that the December deadline for submission of 30 percent of the qualifying contributions might exclude some excellent and viable candidates whose efforts are peaking later than others. We would prefer to see early submission encouraged and offered as an option for candidates wanting to check their progress. Circumstances could eliminate highly qualified candidates if the December deadline is adopted.

We are fortunate this city council had the courage and foresight to adopt Portland's Campaign Finance Fund two years ago. The success of the system depends to a large extent on the future actions of you, our current council members, and will be enhanced by your full participation in the system. Furthermore, because collecting qualifying contributions is labor intensive and time consuming, late announcements of candidacy by incumbents could sabotage the system by shutting the door on broad participation by new candidates. The League will be disappointed if incumbents do not consider the long-term success of the program when making decisions about when to announce your candidacy or whether you participate as publicly funded candidates.

Once again, we thank the Citizens Campaign Commission for the excellent report and recommendations.