



June 25, 2013

The Honorable Lou Correa
California State Senate
California State Capitol, Room 5061
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Senate Bill 27 – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Correa:

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) is pleased to support your bill, Senate Bill 27 which, if enacted, will significantly improve public disclosure of campaign donors to initiative campaigns by requiring committees that raise \$1 million or more to self-identify their top ten donors and to require disclosure of these lists on the Fair Political Practices Commission's website and referenced in the official State Voter Information Guide.

Although CVF does not traditionally take positions supporting or opposing legislation, improving disclosure of financial interests in initiative campaigns to help voters make more informed choices is one of our top goals. That's why we have made an exception for SB 27; we believe it is a vitally important piece of legislation and strongly support its enactment.

While California has some of the best campaign finance disclosure laws in the nation, there is always room for improvement, particularly when it comes to initiatives. Under current law and disclosure practices, it is often very difficult for the general public to analyze and interpret campaign finance disclosure reports. In some instances, such as the Proposition 30 campaign of 2012, there are several dozen committees raising money to support and oppose an initiative.

That's why identifying the top donors is so important – it makes it much easier for voters to quickly determine which interest groups are backing a particular measure if the top donors have already been identified. Your bill takes the extra step of letting voters know through the state's voter information guide, long considered to be the most reliable information source for voters, that these lists of top ten donors are available to them, and ensures they will also be accessible on the FPPC's web site. This step is important because voters who are understandably cautious about much of the political information they encounter during elections are likely to find information from official government sources to be more reliable and trustworthy.

Our initiative process is based on the belief that voters can and should make informed choices. When voters engage in direct lawmaking through the initiative process, they need to have on hand the same kind of intelligence lawmakers rely on when they vote on bills; first and foremost,

voters and lawmakers alike need to know who the sponsor of a proposed law is before taking action on it.

While every initiative has a formal “proponent”, this individual’s identity often fails to reveal to the public the true interests of the groups financially backing the effort. Requiring committees to self-identify their top donors will give voters exactly the kind of straightforward information they need and, according to repeated public opinion polls, very much want. The Public Policy Institute of California frequently polls Californians about the initiative process and has repeatedly found that improving public disclosure of initiative sponsors is supported by over 80 percent of Californians, with support cutting across political demographics. Democrats, Republicans and independents alike want better disclosure.

That’s why the California Voter Foundation advocates for “publicized disclosure” – it is simply not enough to require committees to report their finances and hope the public will go looking for the data; if we are truly committed to educating California voters and helping them make informed choices, then we must put that information under voters’ noses, on initiative petitions and in the ballot pamphlet so it is readily available to voters when they are making crucial decisions such as signing a petition or voting on a proposed law.

For more information and analysis from CVF regarding needed improvements to the initiative disclosure process, please see our paper, “Initiative Disclosure Reform and Recommendations”, available on our web site at <http://www.calvoter.org/issues/disclosure/pub/greenliningpaper.pdf>.

Once again, thank you for authoring this important legislation. I look forward to working with Darren Chesin and the FPPC on this bill and assisting however we can to help ensure passage and enactment of SB 27.

Sincerely,

Kim Alexander
President & Founder