



**Written Testimony of Ms. Terry Pastika
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Center**

**Joint Committee on Government Reform
Hearing on Campaign Reform
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Greetings President Cullerton, Speaker Madigan, and members of the Joint Committee on Government Reform. This is testimony on behalf of the Citizen Advocacy Center in favor of Illinois adopting campaign contribution limits.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is an award winning, non-profit, non-partisan, community, based legal organization. Its mission is to "Build Democracy for the 21st Century." Since 1994, community lawyers have worked to build democracy by strengthening the citizenry's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-governance. The Citizen Advocacy Center motivates individuals and community groups to seek systemic solutions to issues of public concern and works to improve democratic protocols in local and state government to ensure optimal public participation in the democratic process. Working to keep government open and to reform campaign finance laws have been two of our major initiatives for more than a decade.

A healthy democracy relies on a balance between government accessibility, accountability, and transparency on one side and citizen participation that is effective, informed, and sustained on the other. Currently, our democracy in Illinois is weak. A major reason for that weakness is the lack of campaign finance laws that regulate and limit the role of money in politics. As one of only five states in the Country that does not have any limits on direct campaign contributions, the free flow of money into our political system has earned Illinois a long and well documented reputation for political scandals attributable to every level of government. And, while Illinois has tried to address corruption by passing legislation focused on ethics reform and increasing campaign disclosure requirements, a gaping hole has been left untouched: limiting campaign contributions.

Illinois can not reform its national reputation for being the "wild, wild, west" of campaign finance and "anything goes" political culture without addressing this missing piece of the campaign reform puzzle. The lack of direct contribution limits to political candidates has had undeniable results: a remarkable increase in the cost of political campaigns that decreases the pool of available candidates, and a decrease in the effectiveness of small end donors. The flow of increasing amounts of exurbanite cash by political action committees, labor unions, corporations, public body contractors, and regulated industry into our State's political system has been well documented. In addition, the impact of money and politics is of concern for local levels of government as well.

The Citizen Advocacy Center is located in DuPage County. A few years ago, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of DuPage County procurement policies and tracked campaign contributions from DuPage County contractors to 71 state and county public officials from DuPage County over a six year period. Our study showed that contributions between \$1,000—\$5,000 increased more than 250%, contributions between \$5,001—\$10,000 increased more than 350%, contributions between \$10,001—\$20,000 increased 230%, and contributions of more than \$20,001 increased 380%. While current law allows for the free flow of unregulated money into the political system, the above campaign contribution numbers beg the question of whose interest is of primary concern to the public official who receives such contributions: the high end contributor, contractor, or industry representative who can write a single check for \$20,000 or the average citizen who can only give a small contribution?

Democracy in Illinois is at stake due to the balance between government and citizens being out of kilter. Citizens' capacity to effectively participate in the democratic process is shattered due to the unequal playing field of unregulated campaign contribution limits. For citizens to feel as if they have a voice and are valued in the political process, they have to know that their public officials are as accessible and accountable to them as are high end contributors. Citizens must have the confidence that their phone calls, issues, and opinions will not be automatically disregarded because they may conflict with a call, issue, or opinion of a \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$20,000 contributor. Adopting campaign contribution limits is a step towards giving the citizenry their voice back.

It is the General Assembly that has the ability to reset the balance between government and the citizenry. It is time to fill in the last piece of the puzzle and take action to limit and regulate the free flow of money into Illinois' political system. It is an essential and necessary step to restoring our State's reputation and demonstrating that fairness, honesty, and integrity of our political system are of the utmost importance.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Ms. Terry Pastika