

Testimony in Support of SB 762

Respectfully submitted by Joe Baessler, Political Director Oregon AFSCME

My name is Joe Baessler and I work for Oregon AFSCME. We represent over 24,000 working people throughout Oregon. One of the most difficult issues we grapple with internally is campaign finance reform. The difficulty stems from the fact that there are rarely good solutions with predictable results. Our members want to have less money in politics but money is so ingrained in the process it is impossible to eliminate and hard to even decrease. Laws that are designed to decrease the influence of money often just push the money out of the sight of the public. There are restrictions on what are possible because of recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions. Legislation on these issues is forced to be imperfect as it tries to thread the needle between their goals and federal restricts. This creates a situation where while we support the goal of much campaign finance ideas we are often forced to question or oppose them and it cause a great deal of internal conflict within our membership. However the one issue that we all can support is the idea of more and better disclosure and making sure that everyone; unions, advocacy groups and individuals are following the rules that do exist. It might not be the system we would create if we had the power but it is imperative that the rules apply equally to everyone that participates in politics. This is the only way we can ensure a fair election for the citizens of Oregon.

SB 762 is about eliminating a possible loophole or worse method of evading the rules that we must all follow. The exclusion from Contribution and Expenditure report for small donors exists to make sure that those that give a small donation are able to do so easily and decrease the paper work for a campaign in accounting for the five dollar or forty-nine dollar donation that might happen one time. However, campaigns and political action committees are required to track those donations because if they combine with later donations to reach over the fifty dollar threshold then the entire donations must be reported. There is a very real fear that an unscrupulous committee could take in unlimited dollars from an small number of large donors and simply report them as many thousands of donations under the fifty dollar threshold. They could hide their donors and it would be very difficult for anyone to know. This bill requires committees submit the names of their small donors, who they have to track anyway because they might aggregate over the threshold later in the year, and give those names not to the public but to the Secretary of State to track and confirm they are following the rules.

We believe this bill makes sense and it should not be onerous on committee's that are following the rules. It still protects smaller donors that don't want to be solicited but it makes sure that we are all on a level playing field. We ask that you support SB 762 and thank you for your time.