



February 23, 2024

To: Representative Julie Fahey, Chair  
House Committee On Rules  
Re: Oppose HB 4024-3 – False Campaign Finance Limits and Disclosure

## **Portland Forward supports real efforts to curb the outsized roles of big money in Oregon politics, opposes HB 4024-3**

Portland Forward is an intergenerational organization focused on the big ideas that will enhance our community and build an Oregon where everyone can thrive. We have been closely involved in democracy issues for the last decade, including leadership in bringing campaign contribution limits to Multnomah County and the City of Portland; updating the Oregon Constitution to explicitly allow campaign contribution limits; and enacting Portland's small donor public matching program.

At Portland Forward we have advocated for three principles we believe should underly any changes aiming to enhance democracy by reforming our campaign finance system:

- Broaden and diversify participation in democracy
- Minimize the undue influence of big money
- Build public trust and transparency

Given the very short timeframe and lack of public visibility we have only been able to perform a limited review of the -3 amendment to HB 4024, but on initial review it appears to create larger loopholes than it does rules and falls far short of meeting the public's expectations.

The three components known nationally to maximize the effectiveness of campaign finance reform are **contribution limits**, **transparency**, and **public financing**. The proposed amendment does not effectively limit contributions, walks back some aspects of today's already inadequate transparency laws, and is completely missing public financing.

Provisions that allow some entities to donate hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash and untold amounts in professional services including legal services would make the amendment's contribution "limits" limits in name only.

In a strike against the public's right to know who is spending money to influence voter opinion the proposed amendment needlessly reverses transparency laws voters overwhelmingly adopted in Multnomah County and Portland. It also would allow large spenders to hide the true original source of the funds behind nice sounding shell organization names. This is not transparency!

Instead of the proposal under consideration today, the Legislature should focus on broadening who can meaningfully participate in Oregon elections by continuing previous session's efforts to enact a public funding program. Investing a small amount of public funds to expand the range of individuals, perspectives, and lived experiences that can realistically seek public office would be a game-changer for civic participation in our state and grow public engagement while diversifying representation.

If the early reporting is accurate the amendment concept was developed as an agreement by some of Oregon's largest political spenders in a bid to cement their existing power. This is not the way to center everyday Oregonians nor to broaden whose voice is heard in Oregon's democracy. We encourage the Legislature to invest in programs like public financing that will have a positive effect on building democracy in our state instead of this hastily-developed and unworkable proposal.

James Ofsink (he/him)  
President, Portland Forward

### **I. Minimize undue influence of money**

- Lower the rising campaigns costs of campaigns
- Subject all contributions to clear limits
- Avoid the dominance of wealthy and powerful interests, beyond the most general public interest
- Make sure independent expenditures are truly independent

### **II. Broaden and diversify participation in democracy**

- Set contribution limits at levels relatable for most Oregonians (e.g. 1% of median income)
- Equal access to power and equal opportunity to occupying seats of power
- Amplify the relevance of small contributions from real people
- Aid funding of elections to combat dark money and to ensure sufficient resources for underrepresented voices
- Allow those busy persons too busy to research issues and politics to delegate use of their small contributions use to trusted organizations through small donor committees

### **III. Build public trust and transparency**

- Maximize clear public disclosure, including plainly identifying top large donors and funders of independent expenditures in every communication to voters
- Ensure that funds flow in a clear manner, discouraging trickery designed to obscure sources of contributions or independent expenditures.
- Support compliance: rules that can be understood, followed, built upon, and enforced, along with easy-to-access technical assistance, especially helpful for new political participants.
- Create enforcement mechanisms not controlled by the very politicians that the rules regulate.
- Avoid loopholes that swallow the rules and all the principles above.