

## Public Campaign Financing Will Strengthen Democracy in DC

By Ed Lazere

There is a great opportunity to enhance the voice of DC residents in our democracy—particularly residents of color and women—by providing public funding to candidates for major DC offices. Legislation adopted unanimously today by the DC Council, on an initial vote, will provide a public match for small donations to candidates for Mayor, the DC Council, Attorney General, and State Board of Education. This will increase the racial, gender, and economic diversity of people who donate to campaigns, and of the people who run for office. After the Council adopts this legislation on a second and final vote, the Mayor and Council should find the funding to implement it.

DCFPI is a proud part of the [coalition](#) supporting the Fair Elections Amendment Act, which offers public funding to candidates who show they have a base level of support from DC residents. Public funding includes a base amount and a 5-to-1 match for small donations—under \$200 for Mayor and Council Chair, for example, and under \$100 for other Council seats—from DC residents. Candidates accepting public financing cannot accept larger donations or corporate contributions.



Public financing will encourage more people to donate to campaigns and to run for office. It will be especially helpful to candidates who do not have large networks of major donors, including first-time candidates. Bringing in more diverse voices to major DC elections will strengthen DC's democracy.

- **The Fair Elections Act gives low- and moderate-income residents, communities of color, and women a larger voice in DC elections.** Most current donors to DC elections are white, have incomes above \$100,000, and a majority are men. By contrast, half of donors who gave \$25 or less in the 2014 mayoral race were people of color, while half of donors who gave \$50 or less were women.
- **The Fair Elections Act will encourage more people, particularly low-income residents and residents of color, to give to campaigns.** With the generous public match for all small donations residents will know that every donation is meaningful, and small donations are not overshadowed by large donations from higher-income households or corporations.
- **The Fair Elections Act will encourage more people to run for office and increase the economic and racial diversity among candidates.** First-time candidates and candidates from lower-income communities are less likely to have access to large donors than incumbents or candidates from higher-income communities. By addressing this barrier, the Fair Elections Act strengthens democracy and gives more candidates a chance to run a competitive campaign.

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute applauds the Council and encourages the Mayor and Council to fund this important program.