



DAVID E. RYU
COUNCILMEMBER, 4TH DISTRICT

September 17, 2015

Jessica Levinson, Chair
Los Angeles City Ethics Commission
200 N Spring St # 2410
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Ms. Levinson:

I am writing to encourage the Commission to consider additional campaign finance reforms that will strengthen the voice of individual donors, increase voter participation, and simplify process to create a climate for easier enforcement. The Commission and City's focus has rightly been on ways to address the fact that during the March 2015 election less than one in ten eligible voters elected to submit ballots.

I became active in local government through serving on my Neighborhood Council and understand the value of unfiltered public discussion of the many great challenges facing our city. In my own election for City Council, I learned firsthand how cynical much of the electorate has become because they believe no one listens to their concerns. Worse, in my election they believed, wrongly or rightly, that critical decisions facing the quality of life in their neighborhoods are being decided by real estate developers who have a near hammer lock on their government.

That's why I made a pledge to not take contributions from developers in my council district race and believe it should be a city-wide practice. In our conversations with Ethics Commission staff and credible organizations leading the campaign finance reform effort, we were warned that singling out a single group had significant legal hurdles. First, this practice may be unconstitutional and subject the City to litigation. Second, monitoring and enforcing a ban on developers would be near impossible to enforce.

As a result, we began to look at best practices in other cities to increase the voice of individual donors and increase voter participation. For example, both New York City and San Diego have passed measures to limit campaign contributions from certain non-individual entities to simplify disclosure, enforcement and increase participation in local government. If the average voter believes their vote and their contributions matter; we

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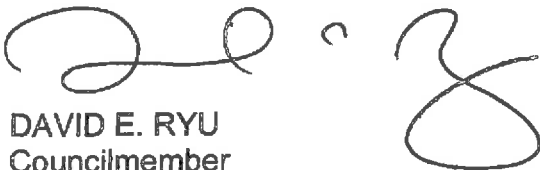
could, as New York City did, see a meaningful increase in the amount of people voting and participating in local elections. My constituents and I firmly believe that important decisions are best made when there is full transparency. Therefore, I request that the Commission explore limiting contributions in local campaigns solely to individuals.

I am also asking the Commission to consider a workable plan to limit contributions from individuals seeking approvals from the City while their requests are being considered by the City Council, City Council Committees and City Commissions. This would be additional to the restrictions imposed on bidders in Charter Amendment H which accomplished meaningful reform. Once an individual has an issue before a governing body, any campaign contribution from that individual could create the appearance of undue influence and reinforces the general neighborhood feeling that interests beyond their control are influencing important decisions in their community. Some cities have explored real time disclosure of such contributions in order to promote transparency. Continued focus on this issue will help restore trust in government.

I applaud the Ethics Commission and Rules and Elections Committee ongoing discussion of reforms. In particular, I am also interested in supporting an increase in matching fund contribution rates from the current 2:1 match in primary elections and 4:1 match in general elections. Raising those matching rates in both primary and general elections would empower small donors and reduce the impact of other proposed restrictions. Increasing these levels to a 6:1 match could enable a donor who can give \$100 the ability to be on the same playing field, after an increased public match, as someone who has made the maximum contribution of \$700.

I greatly appreciate your time, attention and expertise on these matters. I realize that any reforms must balance the constitutional requirements on campaign finance and the need to provide clear, easy to follow rules, promote trust and increased participation in local government.

Sincerely,



DAVID E. RYU
Councilmember

c: LA City Council President Herb Wesson, Chair of Rules and Elections Committee
Honorable Los Angeles City Councilmembers
Honorable Members of Rules and Elections Committee
Heather Holt, Executive Director