

Brenda Rogers testified 6/202007, at the NC House Committee on Election Law and Campaign Finance Reform, in support of HB 1517, the Council of State voter-owned elections pilot. It then passed out of committee to the floor .

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NORTH CAROLINA
in Support of Voter-Owned Elections for Council of State
HB-1517

Chair Goodwin and members of the Election Law and Campaign Finance Reform committee, thank you for letting me speak to you today. I am Brenda Hyde Rogers and I am representing the League of Women Voters of North Carolina. As the vice president of our state League, I have worked this past year to improve our advocacy of legislation that supports League positions on issues, and this bill is very consistent with our national position that financing of political campaigns should enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office and with our state position that supports voluntary public funding of campaigns. I was very proud when I attended the League's national convention last year to hear speakers hold up North Carolina as a model for its publicly financed non-partisan judicial elections. North Carolina is a leader in campaign reform and several states are modeling legislation after our judicial program, including New Mexico, Georgia, and Washington. Other states are approving legislation that provides public financing for Council of State, as well as legislative and gubernatorial races. North Carolina has the opportunity with this bill to pilot public financing of three key Council of State positions and become a leader once again.

We believe that this bill will serve the public good through reducing the cost of running state-wide campaigns and thus enabling qualified candidates who may not have personal wealth to run for office. I don't have to tell you that the cost of running for office in North Carolina has tripled in the last decade so that candidates spend more of their time chasing big money than telling the voters what they believe and what they stand for. This bill will help to level the playing field so that candidates who choose to participate have equal money for their campaigns. Public financing as proposed in this bill will allow candidates to return to the old-fashioned way of campaigning, where they meet the public and ask for small donations and their support. We have heard from judicial candidates that the requirement to raise a

number of small donations from voters in order to qualify has been a very positive experience as they have talked to the public and heard their concerns.

These three positions—Commissioner of Insurance, State Auditor, and Superintendent of Public Instruction—are ideal for the pilot. Agency heads sign contracts for huge amounts of state dollars to be awarded, and the potential for conflict of interest when statewide campaigns require large sums of money is there. These agencies oversee regulatory activities that affect potential big donors to their campaigns, another potential conflict of interest. This bill gives candidates the chance to run for office without special interest money, thus building voters' confidence that our Council of State officials serve the interest of the public and not the interests of those who fund their campaigns. You need to enact legislation that will help to restore public trust in our elected officials, especially given what has occurred in the past few years here in North Carolina, and this bill is certainly a step toward that goal.

The League is pleased that a voter guide is required in this legislation. We work hard across the state to educate voters through non-partisan candidates' forums; however, we cannot reach but a small proportion of the voters, and printed materials will help tremendously in educating the public. A requirement for making our democracy work is an informed citizenry, and we believe that this bill will help to educate voters about the candidates. Help us to achieve the League's major goal of making our democracy work by voting for House Bill 1517!

As you know, the League is a non-partisan organization. The League was a founding member of the North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections coalition, and we work with many organizations that promote our goals of building a more accountable, more accessible, and a cleaner political system. The League believes that House Bill 1517 does just that, and therefore I urge you to vote for Voter Owned Elections for Council of State.

**Brenda Hyde Rogers, Ph.D.
Vice President
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