



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: FREDERICK M. HERRMANN, Ph.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
(609) 292-8700

FOR RELEASE:
July 18, 1989

The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) has approved a report calling for Legislative elections to be publicly financed, according to Frederick M. Herrmann, the Commission's Executive Director.

In a 37-page report entitled White Paper Number Three: Legislative Public Financing, the Commission urges the Legislature to establish a public financing program that would place controls on spending in Legislative races and enable greater numbers of qualified citizens to run for public office.

"The Commission recognizes the fact that money is pervasive in modern-day, candidate-centered campaigns for the Legislature," said Herrmann. "It also recognizes that it is this very pervasiveness that is of mounting concern to the public."

Herrmann noted that a ten-year analysis by the Commission published recently indicated that spending by Legislative candidates increased from \$3.9 million in 1977 to \$11.5 million in 1987 and that this trend is expected to continue during the 1989 Assembly elections. Preliminary ELEC figures show

that primary spending by Legislative candidates has increased by 19 percent over 1987.

Even more troubling is that incumbents are increasing their domination of the raising and spending of money. Consequently, challengers are finding it increasingly difficult to communicate with the electorate.

"A public financing program as an alternative to an electoral system funded strictly with private dollars would permit expenditure limits to be instituted," said Herrmann. "At the same time it would enable qualified challengers to raise and spend enough money to mount effective campaigns."

The U. S. Supreme Court has determined that spending caps cannot be imposed unless tied to public financing.

"Public funding would increase public trust in the electoral process and in the Legislature, enable candidates of limited means to run for the Senate and the Assembly, reduce the undue influence of special interests through contribution limits, and let candidates spend more time campaigning," continued Herrmann.

- more -

The Commission's White Paper analyzes the rationale behind public financing, the variety of programs throughout the country, and the methods of financing those programs.

In addition, the paper highlights proposals already before the New Jersey Legislature and presents a variety of model programs of its own for possible consideration by the Governor and the Legislature.

"A viable program," said Herrmann, "should first and foremost contain a stable source of funding such as a direct appropriation from the Legislature. It should not be unnecessarily expensive, yet it should contain an inflation adjuster; it should provide a good mix of public/private money and reduce the appearance of undue influence."

Herrmann mentioned New Jersey's highly successful Gubernatorial Public Financing Program, which is a matching program, as a sound model for a Legislative program.

The White Paper estimates that a primary and general election program would cost approximately \$6 million per cycle.

- more -

"Naturally," said Herrmann, "a Legislative public financing program would have a cost attached to it, but the Commission believes that this expense is a sound investment in democracy."

###