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**Testimony for the NYC Campaign Finance Board Hearing
December 12, 2005
Submitted by Laura Altschuler, Special Projects Director**

Speaking on behalf of the League of Women Voters of the City of New York I want to thank you for once again holding your hearings on the effectiveness of the this year's Campaign Finance Program in such a timely fashion.

We appreciate the improvements made this year to provide New Yorkers with more of the information they need to participate in the electoral process and make informed choices on candidates. In particular, we were pleased to see that it is easier to navigate the CFB website. We also believe that the video voter guide which ran on Channel 74 is a valuable new resource.

The content of the 2005 Voter Guide was excellent. The larger print made it much easier to read. Putting the ED and AD on the address label of the Guide was inspired and very helpful. However, the design and format of the Guide received mixed reviews. While very attractive, modern and slick, the size and layout too closely resembled campaign literature and lacked the distinctive shape of earlier Voter Guides. Many people threw this year's guide away because it looked like the endless stream of candidate mailings which stuffed our mail-boxes. We took an unofficial poll of League volunteers and the numerous callers to the League's Telephone Information Service and the majority preferred the slim guide that was printed in previous election cycles. Which ever format you use in the future, it might be helpful to title it "Official New York City Voter Guide", noting "You may take this into the voting booth."

The League believes unequivocally in public campaign financing. While a major objective of the program is to make it possible for more New Yorkers to run competitive races for city public office, the program is intended to benefit the public more than the candidate. Voters and taxpayers must have confidence that the system is doing this rather than paying for an excessive amount of campaign literature, adding to the war chests of incumbents who have little opposition or adding to candidates' family finances through the employment of wives, husbands, brothers, sisters or children. The voters and taxpayers of New York City must see a real benefit to them if you expect them to continue to support this system.

While it is unlikely that we will ever see the unlimited spending of the 2005 mayoral campaign by an incumbent, we believe it would be worthwhile to explore alternatives to a never ending multiplication of the match from four to one or six, eight, ten for one. Perhaps consideration should be given to increasing the maximum contribution a participating mayoral candidate may receive when contesting a non-participating opponent with unlimited funds. The most important protection to undue influence is full disclosure so that the public knows who is supporting whom.

What may recur year after year and deserves more immediate review is how to limit the ability of candidates with little or no real competition to receive a four to one match of city funds and retain these city funds after the election. A number of participating candidates for the City Council even turned around and assisted other candidates who had more difficulty raising funds – which means that the original contributor's financial support and city matching funds were not used as intended. While it may be standard practice for candidates to contribute to each other's campaigns we do not think this should be done using public money. Nor do we believe that unused matching funds should be retained by candidates to use in subsequent elections for the same or another office. To permit a candidate to accumulate public money to run for a subsequent public office defeats the very purpose of a campaign finance law created to level the playing field.

In the League of Women Voters 2003 testimony before this Board we urged you to consider barring the use of public matching funds to pay family members on the campaign payroll. City law strictly prohibits nepotism. The campaign finance law should include the same prohibition on the use of city funds.

The suggestion has been made that the program be extended to other offices, such as District Attorney and judges. These are county and state offices and we do not believe that city matching funds should be provided to candidates for these offices. However, we do believe it would benefit New York City voters to have information on these candidates included in the Voter Guide produced for city elections. We are not in any way suggesting that the Campaign Finance Board publish additional guides in non-city election years.

We support public financing of campaigns. Our major concern is that the public not lose confidence in this system and see it as another give away of tax payer money. Public confidence will be retained if the public can be assured that matching funds are used for the purpose for which they were intended and nothing more.