



DC Fair Elections – Frequently Asked Questions

What is the DC Fair Elections legislation and what does it aim to accomplish?

This legislation aims to empower voters by providing limited public matching funds to qualified candidates. This voluntary program will strengthen local democracy, allow candidates and elected officials to spend more time with their constituents, and rein in the influence of big money in our elections.

How does the program benefit candidates and ensure they are competitive?

The program we are proposing is a simple and straight forward system – it's been tested in other cities, counties and states such as New York City, Connecticut and elsewhere. By providing a 5:1 match for all eligible contributions, a startup grant and by allowing People PACs (see below), it ensures that candidates and elected officials who choose to participate are competitive. It frees candidates from having to devote time dialing for dollars so they can spend more time with voters, hearing directly from them about their priorities.

How does the program promote racial and gender equity and ensure candidates who rely on contributions from low-income families remain competitive?

The current campaign finance arrangement disadvantages people of color, women and DC residents. [A report from the think tank Demos](#) looking at the most recent elections found that DC's donor class is whiter, wealthier, older, and more male than the District's population. For instance, more than 60% of campaign contributions come from either individuals who don't live in DC, or from corporations, while only 5% came from voters giving \$100 or less. More than 62% of campaign donors to the Mayor and Council are white, compared to 37% of DC's overall population.

It doesn't have to be this way, there are plenty of small donors whom we should encourage and whose voices we can and should amplify. Women make up nearly half of donors giving less than \$50, and people of color make up 47% of donors giving less than \$25. Each of these groups makes up less than 31% of donors giving more than \$1,000.

Matching funds would help create a better balance by empowering people of color, women and DC residents.

Are candidates required to participate in the program?

No. This is a voluntary program available to candidates running for Mayor, Attorney General, Council and Board of Education. Any candidate is eligible if they accept the program's requirements, including campaign contribution limits and collect enough small donations to receive matching funds. Candidates are not required to participate in this program.

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What are the qualifying thresholds to receive public matching funds?

Candidates who wish to participate in the program must receive a minimum number of contributions totaling a minimum amount, based on the office they are seeking. This ensures that the program's funds are well spent and only support candidates who make a serious effort to compete.

The qualifying thresholds are:

- Mayor: 1,000 contributions from DC residents, totaling \$40,000
- Attorney General: 500 contributions from DC residents, totaling \$20,000
- Council Chairman: 500 contributions from DC residents, totaling \$20,000
- At-Large Councilmember: 300 contributions from DC residents, totaling \$12,000
- Ward Councilmember: 100 contributions from DC residents, totaling at least \$2,000
- At-Large School Board: 100 contributions from DC residents, totaling at least \$2,000
- Ward & School Board: 50 contributions from DC residents, totaling at least \$1,000

How much is the initial earned payment and when is it distributed?

Once a candidate qualifies for the program, they will receive an initial earned payment to support their campaign. The initial earned payments for each office are:

- Mayor: \$160,000
- Attorney General: \$40,000
- Council Chairman: \$40,000
- At-Large Councilmember: \$40,000
- Ward Councilmember: \$40,000
- At-Large School Board: \$10,000

What are the individual campaign contribution limits?

The limits for each office are:

- Mayor: \$200 for Mayor
- Attorney General or Chairman of the Council: \$150
- At-Large Councilmember: \$100
- Ward Councilmember or At-Large Board of Education: \$50
- Ward Board of Education: \$20

What is the match rate for contributions and how does it work?

The 5:1 match rate ensures that candidates who participate in the program are competitive by multiplying small dollar contributions from DC residents. By matching funds, it means a \$50 donation to a ward level councilmember would result in \$250 in public funds for a total contribution of \$300.

- Once a candidate qualifies for the ballot the match rate is 5:1.

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- Before a candidate qualifies for the ballot the match rate is 2:1. If a candidate qualifies for the program before the ballot, they begin at a lower rate that is than retroactively matched once they qualify for the ballot. An additional 3:1 match (for a total 5:1 match) would be provided for small donations received in between qualifying for program and qualifying for ballot.

How and when will matching funds be distributed?

Disbursements will be made from the Office of Campaign Finance no more than four business days after the receipt of a report from a participating candidate. There must be at least three payment dates within 30 days of a covered election. This ensures candidates receive a steady stream of matching funds.

Is there a limit to how much a candidate can raise?

No. Candidates can raise as much money from small donor contributions as they like. The program's matching funds ensure a participating candidate is competitive. There is a cap on the total public matching funds available based on the number of registered voters, but there is no limit to how many small donations they can collect.

Are corporations and political action committees (PACs) allowed to contribute?

Candidates who participate in the program must forgo direct contributions from corporations and traditional PACs. Contributions from People PACs are allowed.

What is a People PAC?

A People PACs is a PAC that accepts contributions of \$250 or less from individual contributors. They are designed to allow candidates to accept support from traditional mass membership based organizations that wish to express their support. People PAC contributions are not matched.

Candidates may accept contributions from People PACs up to \$1,500.

Are cash contributions allowed and are they matched?

Yes. Cash, check, credit cards and money orders are all allowed for making contributions and are matched if they have the qualifying criteria.

Cash contributions have the same limits as other types of contributions. They also require a statement indicating that the contribution is voluntary and that the money belongs to the donor.

Are candidates allowed to accept donations from supporters outside of the District?

Yes, candidates can accept contributions up to the contribution limit from individuals outside the District.

Are contributions from non-DC residents matched?

No. The goal of the program is to empower voters and invest in civic engagement in the District.

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How much will the program cost and how will it be funded?

We invest in roads, schools and vital community programs, our democracy is no different. The program is only expected to cost \$5 million per year, or 0.06% of the budget.

When will the program be up and running?

If the bill is passed this year, we expect it to be setup and funded in time for the 2020 election.

Does the program affect independent expenditures?

No. Independent expenditures will not change under the proposed program.

How do the initial earned payment, small dollar limits and qualification thresholds compare for each office compare against each other?

Office	Voter Empowerment Support		Qualification Requirements		Estimate Maximum Amount of Matching Funds*
	Initial Earned Payment	Small Dollar Limit	Eligible Donors	Amount Raised	
Mayor	\$160,000	\$200	1,000	\$40,000	\$2,880,000
Attorney General	\$40,000	\$150	500	\$20,000	\$600,000
Council Chairman	\$40,000	\$150	500	\$20,000	\$600,000
At-large Councilmember	\$40,000	\$100	300	\$12,000	\$360,000
Ward Councilmember	\$40,000	\$50	100	\$2,000	\$240,000
At-large Board of Education	\$10,000	\$50	100	\$2,000	\$240,000
Ward Board of Education	\$10,000	\$20	50	\$1,000	\$96,000

* Maximum funds are calculated for each office based on a set dollar amount per voter, e.g. \$6 per registered voter for Mayor and \$0.20 for Ward Board of Education. The maximums listed in the table were calculated based on the number of registered voters (480,000) at the time of the most recent general election.

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