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COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND LABOR

Friday, February 9, 2015, 9:15 a.m., Room 016

SB 363 RELATING TO PARTIAL PUBLIC FUNDING
TESTIMONY

Janet Mason, Co-Chair, Legislative Committee, League of Women Voters of Hawaii

Chair Keith-Agaran, Vice-Chair Shimabukuro, and Committee Members:

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii strongly supports SB 363, which would amend the partial public financing laws to increase the public funds available from 15% to 50% of the established expenditure limit. The matching contribution from the State would be increased from \$1 for each \$1 of qualifying contribution to \$2 for each \$1 of qualifying contribution. The measure proposes this change for three offices: the governor, the lieutenant governor and the mayor.

For many years the League has supported programs like that described in this bill in order to reduce the escalating cost of campaigns, eliminate the undue influence of large contributors, free the candidates and public officials from the burdens of fundraising, and level the electoral playing field so that any qualified candidate has the opportunity to run for office regardless of wealth or access to it.

The partial public funding approach shares the expense of running a campaign among a broad range of people: a) individuals who make qualifying contributions directly to their preferred candidate, b) individuals who make a \$3 contribution to the Hawaii Election Fund through their income tax check-off, and c) taxpayers who contribute to the Fund through appropriations such as that requested in this bill.

Over the past 30 years, the \$3 tax check off has been popular. But unfortunately the Hawaii Election Fund was tapped for the operating expenses of the Campaign Spending Commission during the 2008 economic downturn. This means the Fund balance is now modest, and this is the reason an appropriation is called for and only three offices are proposed for partial funding.

Frankly we would like to see this program widespread throughout Hawaii, at both the state and county level. But we concede that it is difficult to predict the utilization rate among likely users of the proposed three-office program. To address this, we suggest the bill be amended so that the appropriation amount is available to qualified candidates on a first come, first served basis.

We urge you to pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.