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March 16, 2017

The Honorable Kevin Mullin
State Capitol, Room 3160
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 1089 – Local Contribution Limits – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Mullin,

On behalf of the Campaign Legal Center, I am writing to support Assembly Bill 1089. This bill would take the important step of establishing a default contribution limit for California jurisdictions, while at the same time allowing cities and counties the discretion to amend the default limit as they deem appropriate.

Candidate contribution limits are an important part of any campaign finance system. For more than forty years, the United States Supreme Court has recognized that candidate contribution limits are a constitutional means of preventing corruption and the appearance of corruption.¹ In addition to furthering this important governmental interest, contribution limits encourage candidates to raise campaign funds from more constituents, thereby engaging more people in their campaigns and in the democratic process. Rather than relying on a small number of big-dollar contributors, to whom an officeholder may be beholden, contribution limits help ensure that officeholders will be responsive to a larger number of people.

Despite the importance of contribution limits, most California jurisdictions do not have candidate contribution limits. According to a recent report by California Common Cause, only 23% of California cities and 15% of California counties have adopted local contribution limits.² In the absence of contribution limits, a handful of wealthy contributors—or even a single contributor—can finance a candidate’s campaign. Unfortunately, such a scenario is not mere speculation. As illustrated in the Common Cause report, in some elections, a single contributor has accounted for as much as 97% of a candidate’s total campaign contributions.³ A campaign dominated by a

¹ 424 U.S. 1, 25, (1976).

² Nicholas Heidorn, *California Common Cause Report: Local Campaign Contribution Limits*, 3 (March 2016), <http://www.commoncause.org/states/california/research-and-reports/local-campaign-contribution-limits.pdf>.

³ *Id.* at 4.

single contributor gives rise to concerns that the candidate, once in office, will be at the beck and call of their campaign sponsor.

The Assembly can address concerns about corruption and the appearance of corruption at all levels of government in California by passing AB1089. The Campaign Legal Center strongly supports SB 1089 and we urge its expeditious passage. Thank you for your leadership on this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CH Kelley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Catherine Hinckley Kelley
State & Local Reform Program Director