



A Memorandum for District 4
Prepared by Vanessa Aronson
Candidate for New York City Council

Big Money Controlling Politics

New York City may be ahead of other cities when it comes to good governance reform, but we still have a ways to go. First, the NYC Campaign Finance Board's Matching Funds Program – which incentivizes candidates to raise money from ordinary citizens, rather than relying on a few wealthy donors, and empowers grassroots candidates like myself to run – has been found to be transformative to the campaign fundraising process.¹ However, even when candidates raise enough in small donations to receive the full amount of matching funds available, there still exists a significant gap between the money in their coffers from the matching funds and small donations and the spending limit, which must be reached to be competitive. I support Introduction 1130, which proposes increasing the cap on public funding available to campaigns so that it aligns in a full match with the expenditure limit. The bill, which is currently laid over in committee, would encourage candidates to continue seeking small donations, instead of relying on large donors who will “max out” their contribution at \$2,750 or \$4,950, depending on the office sought.² This would better ensure that elected officials are listening to all constituents voices equally, not just those with fat wallets.

¹Migally, Angela, Susan M. Liss, and Frederick A.O. Schwarz, Jr. "Small Donor Matching Funds: The NYC Election Experience." *Brennan Center for Justice*. N.p., 17 Sept. 2010. Web.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/small-donor-matching-funds-nyc-election-experience>

²"File #: Int 1130-2016." *The New York City Council*. N.p., 22 Mar. 2016. Web.

<http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2637108&GUID=11C13B83-99DB-4671-AA99-CF5B5827BBF4>

By the same token, the increasing influence of lobbyists, particularly on behalf of business and real estate interests, on city government is continuing to increase each year. Lobbyists in New York City have raked in record earnings in the past decade and the number of hours per week City officials spend meeting with lobbyists also keeps rising.³ A number of steps can be taken to bring more transparency to the lobbying process and decrease the influence of big money in government. First, the City Council should disclose lobbying meetings, just as they disclose monetary contributions, so that the public can judge what influence lobbyists have on the actions of the Council. Second, lobbyists should be required to disclose not only their client list, but also the elected officials with whom, as well as the legislation about which, they are meeting. Finally, in New York City, former elected officials are currently prohibited from any lobbying of their branch of government for one year after leaving government, with many good governance advocates pushing to increase the moratorium to two years. What is not restricted, however, is current lobbyists seeking elected positions in government. That means that individuals currently accepting money to influence policy on behalf of special interests can soon thereafter be at the helm of government themselves. This type of trajectory needs to be taken seriously and monitored closely by government watchdog organizations and constituents alike.

³Durkin, Erin. "Lobbying Blitz: Businesses Spent a Record \$62 Million to Influence New York City Government Last Year." *NY Daily News*. NYDailyNews.com, 06 Mar. 2013. Web. <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/record-62-million-spent-lobbying-nyc-government-article-1.1280918>