



North Carolina Voters for Clean Elections

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CONTACT: Melissa Price Kromm, 919-272-5447 or melissa@ncvce.org

N.C. Landmark Clean Elections Law Remains Strong
All eight statewide judicial candidates have enrolled in public financing program for 2012

RALEIGH – North Carolina’s successful program of judicial public financing continues to enjoy broad, bipartisan support, despite Monday’s ruling in *N.C. Right to Life PAC v. Leake* eliminating a seldom-used component of the system.

Under the state’s innovative public financing program, candidates for the N.C. Supreme Court or N.C. Court of Appeals can raise a number of small contributions from registered North Carolina voters in order to qualify for public campaign funds. Participating candidates must agree to abide by strict fundraising and spending limits.

At question in Monday’s ruling was a matching-funds provision designed to grant additional funds to a publicly financed candidate who is outspent by a privately funded opponent. The ruling removed that one component but left the rest of the program intact and fully functional.

Even before this week’s decision, the State Board of Elections had moved to do away with matching funds based on the 2011 U.S. Supreme Court case of *McComish v. Bennett*.

“While the matching funds provision will no longer be available the program itself remains robust and is an effective tool for combating special interest money in our statewide judicial elections,” said Melissa Price Kromm, director of N.C. Voters for Clean Elections.

“All eight candidates for seats on the North Carolina Supreme Court and Court of Appeals have enrolled in the program for 2012,” said Price Kromm. “Since the program was implemented in 2004, 55 of 69 (80%) candidates have elected to participate in public financing.”

“The 100% enrollment rate in 2012 is especially noteworthy after the US Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision to allow corporations to finance independent campaigns for or against candidates, which some commentators suggested could scare candidates away from voluntarily accepting the fundraising limits that go with public campaign support,” says Price Kromm.

An overwhelming majority of North Carolina voters say campaign contributions to judicial candidates can influence the outcome of court cases. A 2011 poll from the nonpartisan N.C. Center for Voter Education and the Justice at Stake Campaign found that 94 percent of North Carolina voters believe campaign contributions have some sway on a judge’s decision, including 43 percent who say campaign donations can greatly affect a ruling. In that same poll, 48 percent of those surveyed responded that public financing for judicial elections reduces the potential for corruption in the courts, compared to just 25 percent who said public financing has no effect.
