

# Supreme Court Fair Elections bill

## Public financing of campaigns for Washington State Supreme Court

In West Virginia, a Supreme Court justice was elected with \$3 million in campaign aid from the CEO of Massey Energy, a coal mining company. A year later, that judge provided the deciding vote in a lawsuit to absolve the company of a \$50 million fine, imposed by a jury following illegal corporate behavior. Because of this outrageous case, the U.S. Supreme Court has decided that judges must recuse themselves in such egregious cases.

**Justice must never be for sale! - and judges should not have to raise large private sums to run for office. Integrity of our state's highest court is paramount. Equally important is *public confidence* in the fairness of the court - that decisions will never be made based on campaign financiers.**

Recent judicial elections nationwide show lavish spending by special interests on upper level judicial campaigns, with an increase in negative ads and campaign tactics. Meanwhile, polls reveal a concerned public, wanting assurance that courts won't be subject to influence by partisan or special-interest campaign contributions.

**Public financing achieves the desired result.** It's time to eliminate private campaign contributions as a predominant method to fund upper level judicial campaigns.

Let's enact the **Supreme Court Fair Elections bill**, to create a program of optional public financing of campaigns for seats on the Washington State Supreme Court.

## Washington State: Record-setting Campaign Spending in 2006

In Washington State in 2006, over \$4 million was spent by special interests - in contributions directly to candidates' campaigns (\$1.46 million) and in contributions buying independent ads and voter persuasion activities (\$2.73 million) - in attempt to influence the outcome of that year's supreme court races. In 2010, let's rise above this special influence!

## It's working in other states

**North Carolina** - In 2002, the legislature passed full optional public financing for statewide judicial elections, beginning in 2004. In it's first cycle the program applied to five appellate court seats; 14 of 16 appellate court candidates sought to qualify, and 14 achieved the minimum qualifying contributions. Four of five winners used public financing. In 2006, 8 of 12 candidates for six seats used the program, including five of six winners.

Public financing is always voluntary for candidates - they can still run with traditional private financing - but it is increasingly popular among candidates and voters alike.

## Legislative Proposal: Supreme Court Fair Elections bill (HB 1738 / SB 5912)

The Supreme Court Fair Elections bill will create a public financing program, optional for candidates seeking election to the **supreme court only**. Candidates would qualify for public funds by raising at least \$41,055 in contributions of \$10-\$400, from at least 500 citizens. This qualifies them for a set sum for a primary race, and if they win, an additional sum for the general election - amounts sufficient to run a competitive, robust campaign.

If a candidate is outspent by a traditionally-funded opponent or faces opposition from independent PACs, they receive matching "rescue funds" - up to capped limits set in the bill.

The program would begin once \$3 million (per biennium) has been generated by a small surcharge of \$1 on court filing fees - **paid by users of the court, not by taxpayers.**

**Information:** [www.washclean.org](http://www.washclean.org) / [wpc@washclean.org](mailto:wpc@washclean.org) / 206-784-2522