



The Free and Equal Elections Foundation
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Dear _____,

We urge you to co-sponsor and support HB2854, the Ballot Access Reform Bill sponsored by Rep. Jim Watson (R-97, Jacksonville). Like many states, Illinois faces substantial fiscal problems. This Bill will help by providing a new, politically popular source of revenue, while at the same time encouraging greater participation in our political system, in particular for lower income candidates who cannot afford litigation.

HB2854 allows candidates to pay a filing fee of 1% of the annual salary of the office they seek, in lieu of collecting signatures. The choice of either the filing fee or signatures belongs to the candidate. Many will chose the filing fee. That choice will convert a labor intensive objection process, paid for out of the public treasury, into a cash flow for the State.

Compared to Illinois' current, frequently litigious, system, a filing fee empowers lower income candidates. While some will argue that this change favors candidates with money, any candidate can still collect signatures if they do not wish to pay a filing fee. Such candidates will quickly learn that collecting, and if necessary defending, signatures is not an inexpensive proposition. For many candidates, a filing fee is by far the cheaper option. Wealthy candidates can simply hire paid signature gatherers, and do, under the current system.

For those offices which do not have an annual salary, the Bill provides a flat fee of \$50 for candidates who wish to run for such offices.

This Bill does not reinvent the wheel. For primary elections, the majority of States have used filing fees for over 100 years. For general elections, three States currently use filing fees for their ballot (Louisiana, Florida and Oklahoma). Other countries also use filing fees. None of these States and none of those countries have experienced "ballot clutter" as a result of using filing fees.

Nothing prohibits this bill from being passed in the current legislative session, if we have your support. Please use the contact information above if you have any questions. We would be delighted to work with you.

Regards,

Christina Tobin
Founder and Chair, Free and Equal Elections Foundation