



Testimony on Raised Bills 1043 and 7329

Submitted by Isabel Blank, External Affairs Manager

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Good afternoon distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is --Isabel Blank. I am Manager, External Affairs at the Yankee Institute for Public Policy, and I am writing to testify on **Raised Bills 1043** and **7329**. For questions or follow up, please contact me at isabel@yankeeinstitute.org.

I am testifying to raise some broad concerns with the bills.

I live in West Hartford, a town that has been recognized several times for high voter turnout. Nearly 75 percent of us went to the polls this past November—myself included. We can all agree that civic engagement is something we should protect and increase, and I am proud of my town for being so active. Unfortunately, that is being threatened. Connecticut has a system that consolidates power in existing political parties to the detriment of outside parties and individuals; the bills before you continue that pattern and make it more difficult for individuals to become involved in our political process.

Our nation is one of the freest and most open in the world, largely because of the rights we embrace regarding free speech. While it is worthy to want to keep undue influences out of politics, laws that restrict access to the political process tend to create greater power for some while harming others. Our system already requires a significant amount of disclosure, which creates boundaries for smaller groups that have a hard time affording the cost associated with navigating the complexities of campaign finance law.

Connecticut has among the most stringent campaign finance laws in the country, and yet money still finds ways into the political process. What the law has really done is simply make it more complicated for individual citizens to get involved without outside help navigating the complexity of the state's laws.

I am similarly concerned about the provisions in this bill that would compromise donor privacy. The issue of donor privacy has a long legacy in our country. In a 1958 Supreme Court decision, *NAACP v. Alabama*, the court said that non-profit groups engaged in issue advocacy could not be compelled to turn their membership lists over to the state. The court explained, "It is hardly a novel perception that compelled disclosure of affiliation with groups engaged in advocacy may constitute [an] effective restraint on freedom of association."

The need for privacy continues today. In our current contentious political environment, turning donor lists over to the state opens individuals up to harassment or intimidation, and we believe strongly that individuals have a right to privacy. Groups of individuals should have the right to come together to advocate for issues or causes they believe in without the threat of government intrusion, including donor disclosure.

No one deserves to have their private information exposed and to be threatened with violence because of their opinions. In this era of instant internet access, twitter mobs, online bullying, and a charged and highly partisan political atmosphere, compulsory disclosure's chilling effect on free speech is especially dangerous.

It is appropriate for government to be open and transparent – that is so we the people can monitor our government's activities. But the reverse is not true – government should not have the right to pry into an individual citizen's private life or political views. Individuals should get to choose who learns about their beliefs and affiliations.

Thank you.