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Supervisor Gordon Mar introduces changes to the City’s Public Financing program for elections

[San Francisco] In the races leading up to last November’s elections, a number of candidates -- including two of Supervisor Mar’s opponents -- were disqualified from the City’s public financing program for missing a technical deadline, and now Mar wants to extend it.

“Two of my fellow candidates were disqualified from participating in public financing due to the unclear deadline for filing their statements of participation” said Mar. “The administrative burden placed on grassroots, independent candidates is high, and this ordinance will help prevent this unfair outcome going forward by giving an extra three days to file this statement after the nomination deadline.”

In addition to extending this deadline, the ordinance Mar introduced at Tuesday’s Board of Supervisors changes how individual expenditure ceilings -- the cap on spending candidates agree to when they opt-in to public financing -- are raised, and the amount by which they’re raised.

Currently, the ceilings are increased by increments of $10,000 for candidates for Supervisor, and $100,000 for candidates for Mayor, and are only increased when a candidate’s funds exceed the full increment above the current ceiling. That is, if the “ceiling” is $155,000 for a Supervisor candidate, her opponent could have $165,000 in funding before its increased, delaying her ability to respond.

Under Mar’s legislation, this would change, and ceilings would be raised as soon as any candidate’s supportive funds exceed the ceiling by any amount.

“This allows both the ceiling and campaigns themselves to be more responsive to outside spending by Super PACs, which have an outsized influence on our politics” said Mar.

Mar’s legislation also increases the incremental adjustments to the ceiling to $50,000 for Supervisorial candidates, and $250,000 for Mayoral candidates, to better reflect the rising cost of campaigns, empower candidates to more substantively respond to outside spending, and reduce the number of adjustments to the ceiling currently being made by the Ethics staff, which is sometimes done multiple times a day under current law.
“Altogether, these amendments seek to streamline, modernize, and improve a few components of our successful public financing program” said Mar. “We elect leaders to represent the public, not Super PACS or a few wealthy individuals, and public financing helps us do that.”

Mar’s legislation already passed the Ethics Commission, and now is expected to go before the Rules Committee, which Mar serves on, before coming before the full Board of Supervisors, where it will need eight votes to pass.

This legislation continues Mar’s focus on reforms to limit the influence of outside and “dark” money in our politics, following his placement of the Sunlight on Dark Money on the ballot last month -- a focus Mar has indicated will continue:

“This is a first step towards improving our public financing system. As SuperPACs, corporations, and wealthy donors continue to try to buy our politics, and campaign spending skyrockets, this will not be our last step.”