

September 27, 2024

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission
700 5th Avenue, Suite 4010
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Members of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission,

On behalf of the People Powered Elections Washington (PPEWA) coalition, we are writing to express our strong support for the long-term sustainability of the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program (DVP). PPEWA is a statewide, multi-racial, multi-generational coalition committed to ensuring that our government is responsive, representative, and reflective of all Washingtonians. **As you convene to discuss future budget projections for the DVP at your upcoming meeting, we urge you to prioritize recommendations that ensure the program remains fully funded for the next decade.**

Since its inception, the DVP has transformed Seattle's electoral landscape, providing a model for cities across the nation. The recent decision to raise the maximum campaign valuation (MCV) underscores the need for an expanded budget, as higher candidate spending limits will naturally require greater financial resources to maintain the program's effectiveness. As the property tax levy that funds the DVP is set to expire in 2025, we believe it is crucial for the SEEC to recommend an increase in the levy to fully support the program's future needs.

The Democracy Voucher Program has been instrumental in creating a more inclusive, representative, and participatory democracy. It has achieved key successes that align with the original goals of the program:

- **Expanding Political Participation**: The DVP has significantly increased donor participation in local elections, with a fivefold rise in small donors since 2015, many of whom are first-time contributors or from historically underrepresented communities. Notably, lower-income residents and people of color are participating at levels that mirror or exceed their population share.
- **Increasing Voter Turnout and Civic Engagement**: The program has been a powerful tool for encouraging civic participation and increasing voter turnout. Research shows that DVP users are more likely to vote, particularly among low-turnout and first-time voters.
- **Diversifying the Candidate Pool and Promoting Competitive Elections**: By lowering financial barriers, the DVP has enabled a broader range of candidates to run for office, leading to more competitive elections. The candidate pool has become more diverse, with a higher percentage of women, people of color, and younger candidates entering races.
- **Reducing the Influence of Big Money**: The DVP has successfully shifted the reliance away from large, out-of-city, and corporate donations. Dollars from small contributions under \$100 have dramatically increased, while large contributions over \$250 have decreased significantly.

Sustained investment in community outreach is vital to the ongoing success of the DVP. Outreach efforts have successfully engaged underrepresented communities, ensuring that residents from diverse backgrounds are aware of and able to participate in the program. This investment in community outreach must remain a cornerstone of the DVP and its budget, as it has been essential in achieving the successes mentioned previously.

We have been closely monitoring the SEEC's implementation of the program, and we know that staff has carefully reviewed the program needs and anticipated changes. The staff's estimates and recommendations have been pivotal in maintaining the program's successful implementation through multiple election cycles, and we support their recommendations regarding future budget allocations, including the need to expand the budget to reflect the growing participation and the increase in campaign spending caps.

We urge you to prioritize fully funding the DVP for the next decade, ensuring that the program can continue to serve as a model for the rest of the nation and make our elections more equitable, transparent, and accessible to all Seattle residents.

Thank you for your continued dedication to realizing the promise of democracy in Seattle.

Sincerely,
People Powered Elections Washington
www.peoplepoweredelections.org