

Brennan Center for Justice, Center for Working Families, Citizen Action of New York, Citizens Union, Common Cause NY, Democracy Matters, NYPIRG, Public Campaign, Working Families Party

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## **Joint Statement on Governor Cuomo's State of the State Address**

New York - In yesterday's State of the State Address, Governor Andrew Cuomo vowed to lead the push for what could become the most important reform in the nation in 2012: reducing the massive influence of big money in our political system through public financing of elections for New York State.

"It's time we make sure that all New Yorkers have an equal voice in our political process... we must achieve fundamental campaign finance reform by implementing a system of public funding of elections," said **Governor Cuomo**, who indicated that New York City's system would be his model (full campaign finance reform section of the State of the State is attached below).

A broad coalition of good government groups and progressive community groups has rallied around this bold initiative, and will be utilizing their extensive grassroots support and respected positions to help achieve passage of the Governor's plan. These groups include the Brennan Center for Justice, the Center for Working Families, Citizen Action of New York, Citizens Union, Common Cause NY, Democracy Matters, NYPIRG, Public Campaign and the Working Families Party.

"Governor Cuomo's strong call for voluntary public funding of campaigns is an exciting and vital proposal. It could make New York a national example of how to revitalize our democracy at all levels. Meaningful campaign reform would curb corruption and boost accountability. It is the single most important next step to transform Albany. We welcome the Governor's leadership on this issue and are looking forward to helping him make these reforms a reality," said **Michael Waldman, Executive Director of the Brennan Center for Justice**.

"The Governor's commitment to submit a bill to create a system of public financing of elections is a bold and critically important proposal, and Governor Cuomo will be a candidate for good government knighthood when it passes," said **Dave Palmer, Executive Director of the Center for Working Families**.

“Campaign finance reform has long been seen as fundamental to changing the culture in Albany. For far too long, campaigns for state office have been characterized by large infusions of campaign dollars from a miniscule proportion of New Yorkers,” said **Dick Dadey, Executive Director of Citizens Union.**

“When the number of New Yorkers who contribute to political races is less than those living in prison, it is clear that a system such as public financing is needed to encourage candidates to reach out to a broader group of residents,” said **Bill Mahoney Research Coordinator of NYPIRG.**

“Governor Cuomo has moved our state into a national leadership position on campaign finance reform. Public financing of elections, coupled with the campaign finance reform measures he cited in his State of the State Address are key factors necessary to end dysfunction in Albany,” said **Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause NY.**

“There is no better way to put our government back in the hands of the people, reduce government corruption, and restore public trust than a system of publicly financed voter owned elections,” said **Karen Scharff, Executive Director of Citizen Action of New York.**

“We’re proud to work alongside Governor Cuomo and with our strong supporters in the legislature to make sure public financing of elections is enacted in 2012, and we applaud him for making it a priority,” Scharff concluded.

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## **Governor Cuomo’s State of the State section on Campaign Finance Reform**

### *Implement Campaign Finance Reform*

It's time we make sure that all New Yorkers have an equal voice in our political process. Therefore, it is imperative that we implement real campaign finance reform and provide citizens with a voice in the very foundation of democracy -- the ballot box.

New York currently ranks 48th in voter turnout in the nation. Moreover, according to the Campaign Finance Institute, a smaller percentage of the population gives to candidates for election to state office in New York than in any other state.

We must reconnect the people to the political process and their government.

First, we must achieve fundamental campaign finance reform by implementing a system of public funding of elections. New York City's public financing system provides a good model for statewide reform. The system has helped to increase the number of overall contributors -- and especially the number of small donors -- in city elections. To make sure we are protecting taxpayers, we will enact strict limits on total public funding per election, and we will phase the system in gradually.

Second, we must lower contribution limits. For most offices, New York State's contribution "limits" are substantially higher than those of any other state that imposes limits. Further, existing contribution limits for corporations are riddled with loopholes. In short, the state's campaign finance laws fail to prevent the dominance of wealthy contributors and special interests.

Third, we must enact pay-to-play rules to further restore the public trust. Companies and individuals who do business with the state should have no undue influence over elected officials. Accordingly, we must enact low contribution limits for public contractors and lobbyists.

Fourth, we must improve the enforcement of our state's campaign finance laws by creating a new enforcement unit in the State Board of Elections with the independence and authority to investigate alleged violations. These and other reforms to our campaign finance laws are necessary to empower New Yorkers by giving them an equal voice in our elections.

We must enact campaign finance reform this year.