

**TESTIMONY**  
**HB 111**  
**House Elections Committee**  
**April 18, 2007**

The League of Women Voters of Texas (LWV-TX) is an 88 year-old nonpartisan non profit organization that encourages citizens to participate in their government, and become part of the political process. The League is concerned that grassroots participation by voters is being eroded. Escalating amounts of money by individuals who have the means are contributing to some candidates running for political office. The League believes this has gotten out of hand. For example, according to an article in the *Houston Chronicle*, December 6, 2006, one person in 2005-06 gave \$16 million for some candidates running for state and federal offices, making him the biggest individual contributor in the country. Others have given perhaps not as much but nevertheless substantial contributions to candidates that suggest a desire to influence legislation in the donor's favor. The perception is that the general population does not have a real voice in the electoral process when large amounts of money are involved. Therefore, the League supports **HB 111**, by Villarreal that would put a cap of \$100,000 on the amount individuals, partnerships, and limited liability companies can contribute to all Texas candidates in a two-year election cycle.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), 37 states place limits on contributions by individuals to candidates. Many of these reforms have been in place since 1970 and, according to NCSL, "were made because of public concern about the increasing costs of campaigns and the potential for corruption that arises when money and politics are combined." In Texas, since 1995, caps on contributions are limited for judicial candidates only. It's past time for limits to be placed on candidates for the legislature as well. What was a concern in 1970 is a concern among many in Texas in 2007. **HB 111** would cover more than individuals, a difference between this bill and **HB 110**, which covers individuals.

LWV-TX recognizes that running for elected office is expensive. However, the League is also concerned that low voter turnout is partly due to the perception that voters think their vote does not count when a few donors give large amounts of money that the public perceives could influence the way lawmakers vote. "Why should I vote, it won't make any difference," is a statement many of us hear. The League would like to see candidates look at alternative methods of running for office with a grassroots focus and to encourage many voters to help finance candidates of their choice with small donations. Our democracy is at stake when citizens are disillusioned about their role in the electoral process.

LWV-TX representing League members statewide, urges you to support **HB 111**. Thank you.