



**Before the House Government Oversight Committee
House Resolution 56- Urging passage to Ban Corporate Personhood
Sponsor Testimony by Representative Michael J. Skindell
Tuesday, May 16, 2023**

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Resolution 56. This resolution calls on all legislators at the state and federal level, as well as all other communities and jurisdictions, to support an amendment to the United States Constitution that would abolish “corporate personhood” and the legal doctrine of money being equated with political speech.

House Resolution 56 is in response to the United States Supreme Court decision of *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission*, 130 S.Ct. 876, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), which equated spending to political speech and struck down the legal limits on spending in the electoral process. *Citizens United* greatly increased the role of money in politics. The decision practically gave corporations the same political speech rights as individuals, essentially taking away all corporate restrictions on campaign finance and spending in elections.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United* has created an unusual role of money in politics and has established an alarming imbalance in the playing field for ordinary citizens to participate in the political process. This decision has led to the rise of Super PACs, an unprecedented political influence of corporations and wealthy individuals and a distortion of the political and legislative agenda in this country.

According to Richard L. Hasen, a campaign finance expert at the University of California-Irvine, outside spending by groups hit approximately \$88 million in 2012 by July of that election cycle, compared to about \$37.5 million in 2008¹. In a 2014 study by the Brennan Center for Justice, it was found that spending by outside groups--- primarily Super PACs--- reached \$486 million for US Senate races alone that year. The same study also found that Super PACs spent approximately \$1 billion in the past three election cycles since the US Supreme Court decision was handed down; nearly 60% of which, or more than \$600 million, was spent by just 195 people and their spouses².

In addition, a February 2017 report by OpenSecrets.org found that: “During the 2016 election cycle, the top 20 individual donors (whose contributions were disclosed) gave more than \$500 million combined to political organizations. The 20 largest organizational donors also gave a total of more than \$500 million, and more than \$1 billion came from the top 40 donors.”

This troubling trend of substantial increases of the role of money in politics distorts our political structure. It corrupts our governmental system, drowns out voices of the electorate who cannot give

¹ Bia, Matt, “How Much Has *Citizens United* Changed the Political Game?”. *The New York Times Magazine*. July 17, 2012.

² Childress, Sarah, “Report: After *Citizens United*, Outside Spending Doubles”. *Frontline*. January 14, 2015.

massive donations, while also making our electorate more distrusting of the whole process. In a 2012 national poll by the Brennan Center for Justice, they found that “one in four Americans say they are less likely to vote because big donors to super PACs have so much more influence over elected officials than average Americans”.³

We can improve our democratic system by minimizing the role of money in politics. The passage of this resolution will be a good start.

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for your consideration of House Resolution 56. I would be happy to answer any of your questions at this time.

³ Poll: Super PACs Leave Americans Less Likely to Vote” *Brennan Center for Justice*. April 24, 2012.