

**Written Testimony of Ryder Kessler
Democratic Candidate for State Assembly in District 66**

**Submitted to the New York State Legislature
at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
Concerning Local Government**

February 9, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding financing of elections in New York State. I am a lifelong New Yorker who has worked as a voter protection professional and democracy advocate before becoming a candidate for state legislature myself — I am deeply invested in the inclusive, fair, and equitable administration of elections in New York in support of a stronger and more representative democracy.

In 2021, the implementation of a nation-leading public financing program in New York City led to expansive, competitive primary elections for city council and statewide offices. Along with the critically important reforms instituting ranked choice voting, this system produced a city council that looks like the city that elected it. There are record numbers of women, BIPOC members, and LGBTQ members — all reflecting the diversity and vitality of New York. Representation improves, and democracy is stronger, when the barriers to participating in democracy are lower. That includes the barriers to voting *and* the barriers to running.

Without strong public financing, the deck is stacked against candidates with less economic privilege and less robust donor networks; even candidates who do have the ability to fundraising or self-finance are forestalled from focusing on community engagement without a strong public funding system — impelled to spend more time raising money than talking to their district's voter one-on-one. New York residents deserve representatives freed to be sensitively responsive to their needs and preferences; today, too many politicians are responsive instead to large-dollar donors and the institutional funders who power their campaigns.

As New York State implements its public financing program, it must be fully funded. That requires \$40 million allocated by the legislature in order to provide funding on par with the projected costs of the election cycle. New York voters deserve this system being robust so that it can be launched effective. Thank you again for your work on behalf of New York democracy.

Sincerely,

Ryder Kessler