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September 18, 2017

Hon. Chair Jodi Remke  
Hon. Members  
Fair Political Practices Commission  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 249 – Disclose Act – SUPPORT**

Dear Chair Remke and Members,

On behalf of California Common Cause and our members, I write in strong support of Assembly Bill 249 (Mullin) and urge the Commission to endorse the bill. Californians are tired of dark money dominating their elections; this bill will better inform voters about the sources of funding behind ballot measure campaigns and independent expenditures.

Increasingly, voters are being inundated with ads by outside groups, whose identities are less than clear. In the November 2016 election, supporters and opponents of statewide ballot measures spent a record \$485 million to influence voters.<sup>1</sup> Outside groups spent an additional \$83 million in independent expenditures on state contests.<sup>2</sup>

While a candidate must stake their reputation on the content of their campaign ads, there is frequently no such accountability from these independent expenditure and ballot measure committees. Invented committee names are usually unfamiliar to voters, and are often purposely vague or misleading. This makes it difficult for voters to discern who is really behind a particular campaign advertisement, which, research shows, helps voters better evaluate an ad's message.<sup>3</sup>

AB 249 would dramatically improve on-ad disclosures of independent committees' major funders. The bill requires each ad to list the three largest funders of that committee and, for primarily formed committees, includes earmarking rules so that the true donor cannot be hidden by passing their donation through sham committees. It would also modernize and standardize the formatting of these disclosures, so that the public can easily see and understand this information.

California voters overwhelmingly favor common sense campaign finance reforms that give them better and more accurate information. According to a 2011 Field Poll, 84% of voters support increased disclosure of ballot measure funding along the lines of the Disclose Act.<sup>4</sup> For all these reasons, California Common Cause strongly supports AB 249 and we urge the Commission to reject staff's recommendation to oppose the bill, and to instead take a stand for the kind of disclosure on political ads that Californians are calling for by endorsing it.

Sincerely,



Nicolas Heidorn  
Policy and Legislative Counsel  
California Common Cause

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<sup>1</sup> Angela Hart and Jim Miller, “Spending on California 2016 ballot measures hit record,” *Sacramento Bee*, Feb. 1, 2017, available at <http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article130189674.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Miller, “Spending in California’s 2016 election hit \$680 million,” *Sacramento Bee*, Feb. 7, 2017, available at <http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article131308714.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Travis Ridout *et. al*, “Sponsorship, Disclosure, and Donors,” *Political Research Quarterly* (March 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Field Research Corporation, “Tabulations From a Survey of California Registered Voters about their Views About Voting in Statewide Ballot Proposition Elections,” Oct. 13, 2011, available at <http://www.sacbee.com/latest-news/article2555944.ece/BINARY/Field%20Poll%20tabulations%20on%20ballot%20measures>.