

CALIFORNIA PROP 4

Repeals California's Ban on Public Financing of Election Campaigns

Purpose

Proposition 4 is a legislatively-referred state statute that would repeal California's existing ban on using public funds to finance candidates' political campaigns, allowing state and local governments to create voluntary public campaign finance programs in the future. The measure does not create such a program, but sets broad guidelines that any future program would have to follow.¹

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Background

California's Political Reform Act, passed as a ballot measure by California voters in 1974 following the Watergate scandal, sets rules for how money can be used in state and local political campaigns and requires public reporting of political spending.² These rules apply to state and local candidates and ballot measures, but not federal candidates.

Since California voters amended the Political Reform Act via a 1988 ballot measure, the law has banned the use of public funds for political candidates' campaigns. This ban does not apply to certain charter cities, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Long Beach, Oakland, and Berkeley, which currently provide public funds to some campaigns.³ California's campaign finance laws are administered by the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) and the California Secretary of State.⁴

Proposition 4 was placed on the ballot by the California Legislature through Senate Bill 42, also known as the California Fair Elections Act. The bill was authored by Senator Tom Umberg (D-34), and was coauthored by Senator Ben Allen (D-24), Senator Sabrina Cervantes (D-31), and Assemblymember Alex Lee (D-24).⁵ The Assembly passed the bill on September 12, 2025, and the Senate passed it on September 13, 2025. Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill on October 2, 2025.⁶

Proposal

If approved, Proposition 4 would:⁷

- Lift the ban on using public funds to pay for candidates' political campaigns, permitting state and local governments to create public campaign financing programs if they choose to do so.
- Prohibit the use of funds that are earmarked for education, transportation, or public safety in any future public campaign financing programs.
- Require candidates who wish to receive public funds to show broad-based support in their district and to agree to spending limits and other program rules.
- Allow the FPPC to provide guidance to state and local governments on creating public campaign financing programs.
- Leave many design decisions, such as how a program is funded and how much money candidates may receive, to state and local lawmakers.

Fiscal Impact

The California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) estimates that Proposition 4 would create ongoing state costs of a few hundred thousand dollars each year. These funds would support the expansion of legal staffing at the FPPC to handle guidance requests from local governments. The cost would comprise less than 0.1% of the state's total General Fund budget.⁸ While Proposition 4 does not create a public campaign financing program, any program that a state or local government later creates could carry a significant cost that would vary based on how those programs are designed.

SUPPORT FOR PROPOSITION 4

Supporters of Proposition 4 Include:⁹

- California Democratic Party
- League of Women Voters of California
- American Civil Liberties Union of California
- California Common Cause
- Represent.US

As of September 19, 2026, proponents had raised a total of \$235,157.¹⁰

Arguments for Proposition 4

Supporters argue Proposition 4 would:

- Reduce the influence of wealthy donors and special interests, helping to level the playing field for candidates without access to such fundraising networks.¹¹
- Return decision-making power to local voters, allowing them to decide whether a public campaign finance program is right for their community, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all policy.¹²
- Allow candidates who rely on public financing to spend more time connecting with voters and campaigning, rather than fundraising.¹³

OPPOSITION TO PROPOSITION 4

Opponents of Proposition 4 Include:¹⁴

- California Republican Party
- California Taxpayers Association
- Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association
- Reform California

As of September 19, 2026, there are no recorded contributions in opposition to Proposition 4.¹⁵

Arguments Against Proposition 4

Opponents argue Proposition 4 would:

- Divert to political campaigns taxpayer money that should be spent on public services such as education, public safety, and infrastructure.¹⁶
- Place no limit on how many candidates could receive public funding or how much taxpayer money could be distributed in total.¹⁷
- Allow candidates to raise private and special-interest money in addition to public funds, and thus not meaningfully reduce the influence of large donors.¹⁸

A YES VOTE ON PROPOSITION 4

A YES vote on Proposition 4 would repeal California's ban on public funding of political campaigns and allow state and local governments to create their own public campaign financing programs, subject to the limits set by the measure.

A NO VOTE ON PROPOSITION 4

A NO vote on Proposition 4 would maintain current law, under which state and most local governments in California remain unable to use public funds to finance candidates' political campaigns.

Endnotes

- 1 The text of the Proposition is at California Secretary of State, *Official Voter Information Guide, General Election, November 3, 2026*, pp. 115-118, <https://vig.cdn.sos.ca.gov/2026/general/pdf/complete-vig.pdf>.
- 2 California Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), Propositions on the November 3, 2026 Ballot, "Proposition 4," <https://lao.ca.gov/BallotAnalysis/Proposition?number=4&year=2026>.
- 3 LAO, "Proposition 4."
- 4 LAO, "Proposition 4."
- 5 California Legislature, Sen. Bill No. 42, (2025–2026 Reg. Sess.) (Cal. 2025), https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260SB42.
- 6 California Legislature, Sen. Bill No. 42.
- 7 LAO, "Proposition 4."
- 8 LAO, "Proposition 4."
- 9 Ballotpedia, "California Proposition 4, Allow Public Financing of Election Campaigns Measure (2026)," accessed August 10, 2026, [https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_4_Allow_Public_Financing_of_Election_Campaigns_Measure_\(2026\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_4_Allow_Public_Financing_of_Election_Campaigns_Measure_(2026)).
- 10 Ballotpedia, "Proposition 4."
- 11 Tom Umberg, "League of Women Voters, Common Cause, California Clean Money Campaign and Other Advocates Celebrate SB 42 Signature," October 13, 2025, <https://sd34.senate.ca.gov/news/league-women-voters-common-cause-california-clean-money-campaign-and-other-advocates-celebrate>.
- 12 Umberg, "Advocates Celebrate SB 42 Signature."
- 13 Annenberg Media, "A New Bill Would Allow Publicly Financed Campaigns in California," April 24, 2026. <https://www.uscannenbergmedia.com/2026/04/24/a-new-bill-would-allow-publicly-financed-campaigns/>.
- 14 Ballotpedia, "Proposition 4"; CA Secretary of State, *Official Voter Information Guide*, pp. 32-33.
- 15 Ballotpedia, "Proposition 4."
- 16 Ballotpedia, "Proposition 4." See also CA Secretary of State, *Official Voter Information Guide*, pp. 32-33.
- 17 Angelina Delfin. "Your Tax Dollars Could Soon Pay for Political Campaigns." *Daily Signal*, July 16, 2026. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2026/07/14/taxes-used-on-political-campaigns/>.
- 18 Delfin, "Your Tax Dollars Could Soon Pay for Political Campaigns."

