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February 5, 2021

Re: New Public Reporting System for campaign contributions is functionally useless to public and needs immediate revamp. We are extremely disappointed.

Dear State Board of Elections Commissioners,

One of the bedrocks of government transparency is easily usable, accurate, timely campaign contribution data.

We write to urge you to revamp the recently launched [Public Reporting System](#) for campaign finance as soon as possible. We have waited patiently for the new public interface for years and put in many hours trying to help the SBOE make the portal functional and user-friendly. We are extremely disappointed that the Public Reporting System is so plagued by glitches, errors, and bugs as to be practically unusable by the public.

We ask you to instruct the SBOE staff to do the following and report on the timetable at your February 10th, 2021 meeting:

1. Immediately publish the data underlying the Public Reporting System to Open NY, the NYS state open data portal, keep that data updated and ensure the accompanying meta-data is correct.

2. Make the Public Reporting System page on the SBOE website mobile-friendly and usable.
3. Meet by video with concerned stakeholders to collect feedback on the system.
4. Establish and publish a schedule on the SBOE site for when upcoming data will be released on the open data portal and the Public Reporting page on the SBOE site will be revamped.

We appreciate that campaign finance data can now be downloaded as a CSV file, but many basic components of the portal do not work. A quick review by our groups found the following:

- It is impossible to view contributions for all of a candidate's committees simultaneously. Results do not appear after typing in a candidate's name and searching. To get results, the user must type in a candidate's name, wait for a drop-down menu to appear, then choose from one of several candidate committees.
- If one wants to narrow down results by date, he or she must click on the "Date From" fields, but on some pages, the filter currently does not allow for entering the date by clicking or typing.
- The filter does not correctly identify which fields are required. It is possible, in some cases, to leave "required" fields blank and get a search result. Other times, leaving non-required fields blank will turn up no result at all.
- If the user attempts to edit the filter, all of the fields will reset, requiring the user to start all over again.
- The option to search independent expenditure committees by name in the List of Filers, which existed in the previous system, is now gone.
- The option to view a disclosure report summary on the site, which existed in the previous system, is now gone. The only option is to download a CSV Final Summary file.
- Downloadable spreadsheets are improperly formatted – for example, a campaign contributor's name and complete address appear in the same cell.

Lastly, we recommend you look at the Attorney General's [New York Open Government](#) portal, which is very user-friendly and has a good search feature. A single search term can return all of the campaign finance contributions for a candidate going back to the year 2000. Another good example is the NYC Campaign Finance Board [summary page](#), which presents easy-to-use funding information on every candidate. The hurdles in the new SBOE system, however, make campaign finance data even less accessible to the public.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We know improving the SBOE's public data is a priority for all of you and appreciate your efforts in this direction.

Please contact Tom Speaker at (929) 888-4683 or tom@reinventalbany.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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