



**Statement for Virginia Kase Solomón, Chief Executive Officer, LWVUS
US Senate Committee on Rules and Administration
July 19, 2022**

Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Blunt, and Members of the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, my name is Virginia Kase Solomón and I serve as the Chief Executive Officer at the League of Women Voters of the United States, (“The League”). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the *DISCLOSE Act*.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization that was founded over one hundred years ago by leaders of the women’s suffragist movement. We are an issue-focused, activist, and grassroots organization that believes voters must play a critical role in our democracy. Since 1920, the League has worked to deliver on our mission to empower voters and defend democracy. Today, the League has a presence in nearly every community across the country with more than 750 chapters spread across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The League has supported the *DISCLOSE Act* for more than a decade because we believe that our democracy is strengthened when Americans are encouraged to engage in civic participation, and we believe Americans deserve to know who is trying to influence their votes. As an organization, the League has fought for nearly five decades to combat the pejorative influences of money in politics. Our work reflects our ongoing priority to promote open and honest elections and maximize participation in the political process. Voters have the right to know who is making large campaign contributions to influence elections and when contributions are made, we believe it must be done with transparency. The *DISCLOSE Act* accomplishes this fundamental purpose by requiring expenditures and donations of \$10,000 and above to be reported. It also works to address the vulnerabilities that allow foreign actors to meddle in our elections, an occurrence which happened in both the 2016 and 2020 elections.

Every day the League works to inform voters about the issues they care about by providing critical voter services to the public, including providing up-to-date information to voters through our award-winning voter education website Vote411. In the last two years, almost 6.5 million usersⁱ came to Vote411 for information about voter registration, to view candidate information, or to find out what they need to take with them when they go to vote. As an organization, we work to simplify the voting process and provide the necessary information that voters need to make their individual voting plan. These actions make the voting process understandable and accessible which breaks down barriers to participation.

However, it should not fall to organizations such as the League to provide information and ensure transparency in our election process. Federal law should require public disclosure when it comes to dark money groups seeking to influence elections.



Transparency is a baseline requirement for a healthy democracy. It is a concept that the majority of Americans support. According to a nationwide study conducted by the Campaign Legal Centerⁱⁱ, about 60% of voters believe that major changes are needed to our country's campaign finance system. The majority of voters surveyed also believe that the money spent by special interest groups has a direct impact on their lives. And we have seen that without transparency, candidates and election officials fall into the trap of valuing donors and their priorities above the needs of voters. Such de-prioritization of voters only breeds distrust in the republic and those who lead it. There should be little question that this runs counter to the spirit of our democracy and a government of, by, and for the people.

In the 12 years since the Supreme Court decision in *Citizens United*, we have seen the flood gates of money in elections open wide. Enacting legislation like the *DISCLOSE Act* will ensure that donations of \$10,000 or more during an election cycle are reported. Voters want to know who is trying to influence their voices and their votes and who is seeking to influence our elected officials.

Dark money spans the political spectrum and is used by both Democrats and Republicans to boost candidates. In fact, in 2020, a majority of outside funding was spent to promote democratic candidates. Open Secrets, the nation's premier research group tracking money in US politics, estimates that \$1 billion dollars in dark money was spent in the 2020 election.ⁱⁱⁱ Shell companies, outside groups, and political non-profits funneled millions of dollars to Super PACs which help to hide the individual source of donations. Secret campaign money, no matter the party, promotes unbridled power and has no place in American democracy. It undermines the role of the voter and corrupts the election process.

Here is the reality: funding is necessary to run for office and we know that. But it is the dark, undisclosed money that opens the door for elected officials to take office without the public knowing which organizations helped them get elected and the willingness to influence elected officials against the will of the public. When a dark money group spends money in an election, with the intentional purpose to undermine the public, then we start to see the fracturing of America and the fabric of our country begins to unravel. Without disclosure, voters will never fully understand how the issues important to them are impacted by dark money.

At the end of the day, money in politics has an agenda. The dark money groups pouring money into elections have an agenda. Having an agenda becomes harmful when the American people who deserve to know the sources of all money used to influence our politics are opaque.

If we truly wish to make progress on the issues that Americans care most about such as health care, racial justice, reproductive rights, and environmental justice, we must build a system that serves the people, rather than focusing primarily on those with special interests of those with the means and power to influence against the will of the people.



The League will continue to fight to ensure that voters can make decisions free from the influence of dark money and special interest groups. We strongly support the *DISCLOSE Act*, and urge this committee to take up this legislation and advance it to the full Senate for a vote as quickly as possible.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important legislation. I can take your questions today and I look forward to finding ways that the League of Women Voters can continue working with you on this important issue moving forward.

ⁱ [https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2022-](https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2020%E2%80%9320Biennium_Impact%20Report_FINAL_0.pdf)

[06/2020%E2%80%9320Biennium_Impact%20Report_FINAL_0.pdf](https://www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/2020%E2%80%9320Biennium_Impact%20Report_FINAL_0.pdf)

ⁱⁱ <https://campaignlegal.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/CLC%20FEC%20MEMO.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2021/03/one-billion-dark-money-2020-electioncycle/>