

CHANGE Illinois

Coalition for Honest and New Government Ethics

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Deborah Harrington
George Ranney

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AARP
Better Government Association
Business and Professional
People of the Public Interest
Center for Neighborhood
Technology
Center for Tax and Budget
Accountability
Chicago Appleseed Fund for
Justice
Chicago Council of Lawyers
Chicago Crime Commission
Chicago Metropolitan 2020
Chicago Urban League
The Civic Federation
Citizen Advocacy Center
Common Cause Illinois
Congress for New Urbanism
Frotenac Company
Illinois Campaign for Political
Reform
Illinois Public Interest Research
Group
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
The Joyce Foundation
Latino Policy Forum
League of Women Voters of
Illinois
Openlands
Protestants for the Common
Good
Southwest Organizing Project
The United Congress of
Community & Religious Orgs.
Voices for Illinois Children
Woods Fund of Chicago

MEMBERSHIP IN FORMATION

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CHANGE ILLINOIS GIVES VOTERS A TOLL-FREE HOTLINE TO ASK LEGISLATORS TO LIMIT CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS DIAL 1-800-719-3020

SPRINGFIELD – The *CHANGE Illinois* coalition on Monday opened a toll-free hotline for Illinoisans to call **1-800-719-3020** and tell their legislators to enact campaign contribution limits.

Callers to the *CHANGE Illinois Hotline* will be connected directly to their state legislators.

“Large campaign contributions in Illinois are muting the voice of the public and preventing real progress on the issues that matter,” said Bob Gallo, AARP Illinois Senior State Director. “Enough is enough – we need campaign contribution limits now. The people deserve to get their voice back.”

AARP is reaching out to its nearly 2 million members across Illinois asking them to call the hotline and urge their legislators to stop the flow of special interest money into Springfield. The number also will be featured in an upcoming article in the AARP Bulletin publication which is sent to all AARP members in the state.

Launched in late February, *CHANGE Illinois* is a coalition of civic, business, professional, non-profit and philanthropic organizations aligned to bring government integrity to Illinois. The coalition includes many civic leaders and organizations, including AARP, the Chicago Urban League, The Civic Federation, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, and the Latino Policy Forum.

CHANGE Illinois also today announced many additional members, including the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, the Citizen Advocacy Center, the Community Renewal Society, the Metropolitan Planning Council, the Southwest Organizing Project and Voices for Illinois Children. (Complete list of members available at www.ChangeIL.org.)

The three co-chairs of *CHANGE Illinois* -- Peter Bensinger, former Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency; Deborah Harrington, President, Woods Fund of Chicago; and George Ranney, President and CEO of Chicago Metropolitan 2020 -- are scheduled to appear Monday afternoon before the General Assembly’s Joint Committee on Government Reform. They will testify about the importance of the coalition’s first priority: enacting strict limits on the amount of money that can be given to candidates and political action committees.

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CHANGE Illinois advocates replacing the state's unregulated campaign finance system with one modeled after the contribution limit system in place at the federal level and in almost all other states. Contribution limits, combined with more frequent public reporting of contributions and strengthened oversight of campaign finance laws, would put Illinois on the road to real reform.

"While money is said to be the mother's milk of politics, it is also the grease on the wheels of corruption in government," Bensinger said. "Illinois needs a major change in its political climate, and that requires new rules limiting contributions to candidates and strong oversight of the campaign finance system."

"There are many fine men and women throughout our government, but they are toiling in a system that clearly is broken," Ranney said. "Illinois voters are skeptical about the fairness of government, and business executives around the world are, too. The headlines about recent scandals cemented the state's bad reputation and left business leaders wary about investing in Illinois."

"The unlimited nature of the state's current campaign finance system has left those with little resources feeling they have little power to influence government," Harrington said. "But as long as their voices are loud and we all work together, we have the ability to change our government. Changing the status quo is never easy, but it is not impossible."

In partnership with its members, the **CHANGE Illinois** coalition is building a grassroots network that will keep the spotlight on reform. In addition to the toll-free hotline and advertising to mobilize public support, the effort will include a speakers bureau, policy-maker briefings, community forums, editorial board meetings, a web-based petition drive, and online communications. The coalition also has an educational website (www.CHANGEIL.org).

"Removing one person from office does not solve the problem," said Cynthia Canary, Director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform. "Unlimited campaign contributions have led to wasteful spending, altered the power structure and distorted the debate of issues in Springfield."

Canary pointed out that the federal election system limits contributions to candidates and 45 other states have laws limiting contributions.

"Limiting contributions is not all that is needed to make our government fair and honest, but it is a very important step," Canary said. "Contribution limits will help make state government more representative of Illinoisans and more responsive to all citizens."

The coalition members agree that there are many avenues for political reform, including an end to gerrymandering of legislative districts, more openness in government, more public information about the economic interests of government officials, and tighter regulation of lobbying. Those and other ideas will be examined in the coming months.

Anyone interested in joining the coalition or learning more about its mission should visit its website (www.ChangeIL.org).