



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **JOINT STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE NEW JERSEY ELECTION LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION**

In 1973, the New Jersey Legislature enacted a pioneering and sweeping campaign finance law, which also established the Election Law Enforcement Commission, a bipartisan independent agency tasked with promoting transparency and accountability in the financing of our state and local elections.

Like our judicial system, fundamental to ELEC's ability to perform its tasks effectively is its independence and separation from partisan politics.

Elimination of its independence is an open invitation to political meddling.

A provision added at the last minute to the pending "Election Transparency Act" would give the governor the power to appoint ELEC's executive director, as well as the power to terminate that top official for any or no reason. This provision flies in the face of the original intent of the 1973 statute, which was for the agency to be independent and free from any perceived- or actual- interference of politics.

Regardless of which party controls the governor's office, executive directors appointed by one party, or under the constant threat of termination, would be more susceptible to blocking investigations of their party's candidates or committees while targeting those of the opposing party. And of equal concern, an ELEC run by a political appointee could not investigate or bring enforcement actions against campaigns conducted by the opposing party without suspicion of partisan motives.

ELEC must be fair and non-partisan in its actions. That is how it has always operated, and it must continue to do so.

Without the outrage ignited by political scandals in the early 1970s, state Sen. William Schluter's reform bill creating ELEC most likely would have faced a quiet death in the legislative hopper.

Commenting on the new law, Herbert Alexander, one of the nation's foremost experts on campaign finance issues, said: "In many respects, it is about the best state law in the country." Donald Herzberg, then-

director of the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers University, described it as the “toughest disclosure law in the United States.” The Star-Ledger called it “a national model.”

Just weeks away from its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ELEC as an institution has survived with its integrity intact through the terms of ten governors- five Democrats and five Republicans.

The current Commission members- two Democrats and one Republican- strongly urge the Legislature and the Governor to maintain ELEC’s independence and insulation from partisan politics, and reject these ill-advised proposals.

- Commission Chairman Eric H. Jaso and the honorable Stephen M. Holden and Marguerite T. Simon