

## **Prop C's Chilling Effect on San Francisco Public Policy**

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Prop C will have a chilling effect on the ability of non-profit organizations to be part of the public process and will hurt our local democracy. We agree with Prop C's worthy goal to increase transparency into the sources of funding for "expenditure" lobbying. But by using the ballot rather than the normal legislative process, the drafters excluded impacted communities from the public debate, producing a measure filled with unintended consequences.

Prop C would redefine *any* person or *any* group that spends money to educate or engage the public on city policies—be it community outreach, media, research, or reporting—as an expenditure lobbyist. These so-called lobbyists would then have to register with the Ethics Commission, pay annual fees, and file monthly disclosures. The measure applies the same burden and intimidating scrutiny to individuals and organizations operating with a civic purpose as it does to profit-driven businesses. That includes your day care, senior services, neighborhood centers and every other non-profit organization with an interest in public policy.

San Francisco's non-profit organizations have a long history of successful public-interest advocacy for significant social, environmental, economic, and cultural changes to address community needs in areas like civil rights, health care, housing, energy, parks, transit, arts, and economic development. They work on everything from the smallest neighborhood problems to issues of global significance like climate change.

Prop C's requirement for all organizations to meet the same onerous requirements would ironically reinforce the pay-to-play dynamics that the measure is intended to shine light on. Only non-profits with enough money to buy good legal counsel are going to be comfortable wading in to the new set of requirements. Meanwhile, less well-funded, more "amateur" voices will be less able to participate.

This measure should have been directed by the Ethics Commission to the Board of Supervisors as legislation, where it would have undergone a fully vetted process in the most public forum. This would have allowed for easier correction of flaws and unintended consequences. Enacting Prop C at the ballot will lock us into an inflexible and far-reaching law that is nearly impossible to amend. There is certainly a way to provide more transparency into the so-called "astro-turf" organizations—faux-grassroots efforts that are

fronts for economically interested entities—and if the voters reject Prop C, we should work on a better measure that does just that.

Organizations from a broad spectrum of political backgrounds oppose Proposition C, including SPUR, the Council of Community Housing Organizations, S.F. Human Services Network, SF Tenants Union, AIDS Housing Alliance, Senior & Disability Action, Latino Democratic Club, San Francisco Rising, Jobs with Justice, United Educators of SF, SEIU 1021, the San Francisco Building and Construction Trades Council, and the San Francisco Labor Council.

This well-intentioned measure may appeal to voters concerned about the influence of money on politics in America, but will actually do more harm than good.