



## NEWS RELEASE

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**PRESS RELEASE**

The New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC), in the sixth of a series of analytical reports, today released a white paper setting forth ideas for strengthening its independence and for modifying its jurisdictional scope.

Frederick M. Herrmann, Executive Director of ELEC, said that the discussion of the Commission's independent status is the most thorough and comprehensive discussion of this topic undertaken by the agency in its eighteen year history.

Herrmann added: "the paper compliments White Paper Number Four: Ideas for Alternative Funding, in that, besides suggesting that the Commission be allowed to support its budget and staff through filing fees, it is now searching for ways to modify the disclosure law to ease the administrative burden both on itself and the candidates and committees that file with it."

According to the White Paper, "the Commission, while acknowledging the fact that provisions in the statute protect its integrity and appreciating the fact that this integrity has been respected by four Governors and several Legislatures, nevertheless is impelled to offer suggestions for strengthening this protective shield."

Herrmann said that to strengthen its statutory and traditional autonomy, the Commission suggested that: the terms of the Commission members should be lengthened to six years and its alternate funding plan should be enacted.

"Longer terms," said Herrmann, "would further insulate Commissioners from any potential pressures of partisan influence and would ensure that quality persons continue to serve on the Commission. Moreover, a secure base budget, offset by filing fees, would distance the Commission from the normal budget process controlled by the public officials it regulates as candidates."

The paper also evaluates the role of the Commission in New Jersey's electoral system, reviews its laws and jurisdictional scope, and makes recommendations for change.

Herrmann said: "Among the recommendations for narrowing ELEC's jurisdictional scope are the elimination of state filing requirements for school board candidates as well as for candidates in special district elections, such as fire districts. In addition, the Commission is suggesting that for filing

purposes May Municipal and Run-off elections be treated as one election and that short filing forms be included as part of the petitions given to primary and independent candidates to collect signatures for ballot qualification."

The Commission is recommending also that it obtain jurisdiction over the issues of prohibited contributions and identification of political advertising. It is recommending that sole jurisdiction over lobbying disclosure be placed in ELEC, that the "Personal Financial Disclosure Act" be reformed to require that the exact amounts of gifts and honoraria be disclosed as well as their sources, and that the various contributor and committee reporting thresholds be adjusted to account for inflation. Finally, it is recommending that statutory guidelines for surplus funds use be enacted by the Legislature.

"In suggesting ways to enhance its independence and to both narrow and expand in jurisdictional scope," said Herrmann "the Commission is hoping to ease the difficulty of reporting for local and low spending filers and to ease the administrative burden on its small staff. Moreover, it is seeking to improve upon its already high level of credibility while at the same time insuring that meaningful information continues to be available to the public."

"The Commission, with this report, is delighted to break new ground with its discussion of its statutory and traditional based autonomy, and to contribute to the continuing debate on campaign financial and lobbyist disclosure issues facing New Jersey," concluded Herrmann. "The independence, funding, and jurisdiction of ethics agencies are issues of interest and concern beyond New Jersey; and ELEC, as it has in the past with its other analyses, hopes to promote a discussion of these matters at the national level."

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