

August 30, 2017

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commissioners
700 5th Ave, Suite 4010
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing to express a concern about the replacement voucher process of the Democracy Voucher program, and ask that you allow third party organizations to hand-out (but not collect) replacement vouchers in the same manner that the SEEC has allowed for candidates.

The current process disproportionately makes it harder for low income populations to participate in the program as a whole. We feel that our proposed solution to the replacement voucher process, aligns with the intent of the law, promotes equity, and fits squarely within the language of the law as it is currently written.

Our organizations represent many different communities within our city. We have seen that the vast majority of people had thrown their vouchers out accidentally. Unfortunately, the current voucher replacement process is not one that is accessible for low income, elderly, and disenfranchised communities in Seattle. Currently, in order to receive a replacement voucher a Seattle resident must download or submit a replacement form online, print it out, send it in, wait for it to be reviewed, the city then sends out replacement vouchers by mail or via email, wait for them to arrive, make sure to grab them so they don't end up in the recycling bin again, and then mail them back.

This process requires people who need a replacement voucher to have 1) Access to the internet, 2) Access to a computer with a printer or 3) Access to a stable home address where they can receive mail or access to email days after the initial request was made, and 4) Access to a stamp or access to a smart phone that can send pictures. 5) An understanding of how to engage in this potentially confusing process. This process has proven too complicated at best and impossible at worst for many within our city and disproportionately harms those for whom the voucher program was meant to increase their access to political engagement.

The SEEC has rightfully determined that the language of the law gives them the appropriate discretion to allow for alternate processes for allowing people to obtain replacement vouchers. The language of the states in Section 2.04.658: (emphasis added)

If a Democracy Voucher recipient believes that his or her Democracy Voucher was lost, stolen or fraudulently or improperly assigned or redeemed, SEEC shall require a notarized declaration or affidavit or **additional process in its judgment to find the relevant facts then provide relief it deems appropriate** including Democracy Voucher replacement...

As a result of this language SEEC has developed a document for campaigns to both replace a voucher and collect the voucher in the same form. This allows the campaign to hand-out replacement vouchers to people who believe they have lost their vouchers without any prior individual verification from SEEC. While we agree with this interpretation and agree that this process grants more access, we would go a step further and allow third party organizations to do the same.

We ask today that the Commission rule that third party organizations not associated with a campaign can hand out (but not collect) replacement vouchers. There is no reason in the law that candidates should be given more ability to replace vouchers than other groups. In fact, Section 2.04.620(d) clearly spells out that the only people who may collect completed vouchers are the candidates, the SEEC or the candidate's representative, but the law is silent on any limits to who may hand out replacement vouchers. Once again we are not asking to collect vouchers, only to hand out replacement forms.

By limiting the replacement form process to only candidates and their campaigns we run into the same problems that cause disproportionate harm to low income and marginalized populations within our city. Candidates tend to target only registered voters with a strong voting history, and people who live in neighborhoods that are canvassable or who they meet at events or fundraisers. This means that the profile of a candidate's contacts throughout a campaign is generally whiter, richer, and already more connected to the political establishment than the general population of Seattle.

This law was intended to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their voice heard, regardless of their income level or political status within our city. And on that the initiative and our organizations' goals are aligned. We take great pride in the relationships we have built within our community with our memberships. Our members look to us to help with things like their Democracy Vouchers. And yet because we do not have access to have the same replacement form the campaigns have we cannot help our members participate in the program in one simple step.

We understand that the Democracy Voucher program is new, and we are learning how best to implement this as we go. We appreciate the SEEC's willingness to work with our organizations throughout this process. Challenges are sure to arise when major policies are put into action, and with the Commission's guidance we have the opportunity to easily fix one of these challenges that is keeping many in our City from participating in the program.

Sincerely,

SEIU 1199NW
SEIU 775
UFCW 21
Working Washington

cc: Wayne Barnett