

Item 10 - Staff Memorandum - 2025-2026 Campaign Finance Limits Adjustment



Ryan Micik, Chair
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TO: Public Ethics Commission
FROM: Jelani Killings, Ethics Analyst
Suzanne Doran, Program Manager
DATE: January 17, 2025
RE: Biennial Adjustment to Campaign Contribution Limits, Voluntary Spending Limits, and Maximum Democracy Dollars Public Financing Proceeds

The Public Ethics Commission (PEC or Commission) is responsible for adjusting Oakland's Campaign Contribution and Spending Limits as well as the maximum Democracy Dollars public financing per candidate for covered offices biennially according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the preceding two years, pursuant to the Oakland Campaign Reform Act and Fair Elections Act.

This memorandum provides background information about the biennial adjustment and a staff recommendation that the Commission approve the attached list of contribution limits, voluntary spending limits, and Democracy Dollars maximum proceeds for the 2025-2026 election cycle.

Background

The Oakland Campaign Reform Act (OCRA) imposes limits on campaign spending and seeks to reduce the influence of large contributions on election outcomes. OCRA tasks the Commission with biennially adjusting the contribution limits for campaigns and campaign-related actions in Oakland and the Oakland Fair Elections Act (OFEA) tasks the Commission with biennially adjusting the designated voluntary spending limits and maximum Democracy Dollars proceeds for elected offices. Below are the applicable sections of the Oakland Campaign Reform Act and Oakland Fair Elections Act:

- Limitations on Contributions from Persons ([O.M.C. Sec. 3.12.050](#))
- Limitations on Contributions from Broad-Based Political Committees ([O.M.C. Sec. 3.12.060](#))
- Spending Limits for applicants and certified candidates for Democracy Dollars ([O.M.C. Sec. 3.15.200](#))
- Maximum amount of Democracy Dollar proceeds for covered offices ([O.M.C. Sec. 3.15.130](#))

The above sections establish a framework that limits contributions to candidates to \$600 per individual and \$1,200 per broad-based political committee. Contribution limits, voluntary spending limits, and the maximum Democracy Dollars amounts for covered offices are each adjusted biennially according to the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), as provided in the above sections.

Biennial Adjustment

OCRA and OFEA specify the timing and nature of increases, providing that the amounts listed in each of the above sections must be increased biennially according to the CPI for all Urban Consumers in the

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San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA metropolitan statistical area, as published by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics. The increase in the contribution limit amount is “by the [CPI] percent increase, if any,” and the adjustment “shall be rounded to the nearest fifty (\$50).” The increase in the spending limitation amount is “by the [CPI] percent increase, if any,” and the adjustment is rounded to the nearest five hundred (\$500) value. The increase in the maximum amount of Democracy Dollar proceeds is the percent increase in the CPI, “rounding to the nearest five hundred dollar (\$500) value.” For adjustments to spending limits and Democracy Dollar proceeds, if the Commission makes a finding that the increase in the Consumer Price Index is very high, the Commission may limit the increase to three percent ([OMC 3.15.200\(D\)](#)).

Per Staff’s calculation, the increase over the prior two years was 6.5 percent, averaging about 3 percent per year. After rounding the dollar amount per OCRA and OFEA, the adjusted limits are as follows:

Contribution Limit	2023-2024	2025-2026
Individual	\$600	\$650
Broad-Based Committee	\$1,200	\$1,300
Voluntary Spending Limit		
Mayor	\$500,000	\$532,500
City Attorney, City Auditor, City Councilmember At-Large	\$250,000	\$266,500
District City Council	\$150,000	\$160,000
School Board	\$100,000	\$106,500
Maximum Democracy Dollars Proceeds		
Mayor	\$333,333	\$355,000
City Attorney, City Auditor, City Councilmember At-Large	\$166,667	\$177,500
District City Council	\$100,000	\$106,500
School Board	\$66,667	\$71,000

OCRA and OFEA also require that the contribution and spending limit amounts and maximum Democracy Dollars proceeds be published no later than February 1st of the adjustment year.

Conclusion & Staff Recommendation

The CPI data¹ for 2024 was released by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, on January 15, 2025. Commission staff used this data to calculate the increase for the 2025-2026 contribution and voluntary spending limits and maximum Democracy Dollars proceeds as required by the Oakland Campaign Reform Act and Oakland Fair Elections Act. **Staff recommends the Commission approve revised contribution limits, voluntary spending limits, and Democracy Dollars maximum proceeds for 2025-2026 as listed above, which will go into effect upon Commission approval (January 29, 2025).** Once approved, Commission staff will distribute the new information widely through its email distribution lists and communication channels.

Attachment: Campaign Contribution Limits, Voluntary Spending Limits, and Maximum Democracy Dollars Proceeds for 2025 - 2026

¹ https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet?data_tool=dropmap&series_id=CUURS49BSAo,CUUSS49BSAo

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CITY OF OAKLAND 2025-2026 CAMPAIGN FINANCE LIMITS

LIMIT ON CONTRIBUTIONS FROM PERSONS (§3.12.050) \$650

LIMIT ON CONTRIBUTIONS FROM BROAD-BASED POLITICAL COMMITTEES (§3.12.060) \$1,300

VOLUNTARY SPENDING LIMITS FOR MAYOR AND OTHER CITYWIDE OFFICES (§3.15.140)

Mayor	\$532,500
City Auditor	\$266,500
City Attorney	\$266,500
City Council Member At-Large	\$266,500
District City Council Member	\$160,000
School Board Director	\$106,500

MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF DEMOCRACY DOLLAR PROCEEDS (§3.15.130)

The limit for uncontested elections is \$10,000.

	Contested Election
Mayor	\$355,000
City Auditor	\$177,500
City Attorney	\$177,500
City Council Member At-Large	\$177,500
District City Council Member	\$106,500
School Board Director	\$71,000

LIMIT ON PERSONAL SPENDING FOR DEMOCRACY DOLLARS PARTICIPANTS (§3.15.150(C))

Mayor	\$20,000
City Auditor	\$20,000
City Attorney	\$20,000
City Council Member At-Large	\$20,000
District City Council Member	\$13,000
School Board Director	\$8,500