
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 644 (Blakespear) - Political Reform Act of 1974: contribution limits

Version: May 1, 2025

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 12, 2025

Policy Vote: E. & C.A. 4 - 1, ED. 6 - 1

Mandate: Yes

Consultant: Robert Ingenito

Bill Summary: SB 644 would impose campaign contribution limits for candidates for judicial, community college board, and school board offices, as specified.

Fiscal Impact: The Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) indicates that it would incur first-year costs of about \$1 million, and \$984,000 annually thereafter, to implement the provisions of the bill (General Fund).

Background: Under current law, local governments generally have the authority to adopt contribution limits for local office elections in their jurisdictions, and until 2021, state law did not impose any limits on contributions to candidates for local office. Then AB 571 (Mullin), changed that by establishing, effective January 1, 2021, statewide campaign contribution limits for county and city offices at the same limit on contributions from individuals to candidates for Senate and Assembly.

FPPC enforces the statewide limits, but AB 571 allows a county or city to establish its own contribution limits that prevail over the statewide limit. If a county or city does so, the FPPC does not enforce those limits, as the local jurisdiction is responsible for enforcement and administration of its limits. In many cases, local campaign finance laws are enforced by the district attorney of the county or by the city attorney. In a few cases, local jurisdictions have set up independent boards or commissions to enforce the local campaign finance laws.

Proposed Law: This bill, among other things, would do the following effective January 1, 2027:

- Add judicial offices, community college district board members, and school district board members to the list of offices for which the specified statewide contribution limit applies.
- Allow the Judicial Council to impose contribution limits that are more restrictive than the statewide limit for candidates for elective judicial office and to adopt enforcement standards, including penalties, for violations.
- Allow school district and community college district boards by resolution to adopt contribution limits that are more restrictive than the statewide limit. The bill would preserve any contribution limits adopted by a district prior to January 1, 2027. The district may also adopt enforcement standards, including penalties, for violations.

- Specify that FPPC shall not have enforcement or administrative responsibility for the contribution limits adopted by the Judicial Council, a school district, or a community college district.
- Require FPPC to adopt guidelines for the implementation of this bill.

Related Legislation:

- SB 328 (Dodd, 2023) was similar to this bill, and would have applied the same contribution limitations for candidates seeking city and county elective offices to candidates seeking all other local elective offices, including school boards and community college boards. The bill was held under submission on the Suspense File of the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.
- AB 571 (Mullin, Chapter 556, Statutes of 2019) established beginning in 2021 the current statewide campaign contribution limits for county and city offices, which it set at the same level as those for candidates for the Assembly and Senate. The bill also allowed a county or city to establish its own contribution limits, which would prevail over these default limits.
- AB 1089 (Mullin, 2017) would have imposed statewide contribution limits for all levels of local governments, including school boards. The bill was held under submission on the Suspense File of the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.
- AB 2523 (Mullin, 2016) would have imposed statewide contribution limits for all levels of local governments, including school boards. This bill failed passage on the Senate Floor.

Staff Comments: FPPC anticipates requiring six positions to accommodate the bill's resulting enforcement workload activity. The Commission notes that this bill would apply the PRA contribution limits to over 1,000 local districts.

Any local government costs resulting from the mandate in this measure are not state-reimbursable because the mandate only involves the definition of a crime or the penalty for conviction of a crime.

-- END --