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## **ST. PETERSBURG CITY COUNCIL VOTES TO ABOLISH SUPER PACS AND LIMIT FOREIGN CORPORATE MONEY IN LOCAL ELECTIONS**

*First of its kind in the nation, the ordinance seeks to protect the integrity of elections in  
St. Petersburg, Florida*

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – October 5, 2017 -- The St. Petersburg City Council voted today to abolish super PACs and prohibit spending by foreign-influenced corporations in city elections. St. Petersburg is the first community in the country to pass a law of this kind.

“We are protecting St. Petersburg with this proactive ordinance,” says Darden Rice, Chair of St. Petersburg City Council. “Curbing Super PAC money and foreign corporate money in our local elections is an act of leadership to safeguard our democratic process.”

The ordinance will require corporations that spend money in St. Petersburg elections to certify they are not foreign-influenced, or owned in whole or a significant part by foreign entities. The ordinance will also establish limits on contributions to political action committees, thereby abolishing super PACs in local elections.

“Campaign spending reform will not come from Washington or Tallahassee. If we are going to stop the tidal wave super PAC money, it will have to start with cities brave enough to challenge it,” says Karl Nurse, St. Petersburg Councilmember

In March 2010, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit in *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* opened the door to super PACs by holding that the federal law limiting contributions to political committees to \$5,000 per person each year did not apply to a political committee that promised to make only “independent expenditures.” While some federal appellate circuits have followed the *SpeechNow* ruling, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, which has jurisdiction over federal cases in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, has yet to rule on this question, nor has the U.S. Supreme Court or the Florida Supreme Court.

Super PACs have nearly doubled in number since 2012, and, [according to the Miami Herald](#), donations to “groups [that] enjoy no limits on individual donations,” such as super PACs, “have skyrocketed” in recent years across Florida. Many campaign finance scholars argue that super PACs have now become vehicles for wealthy donors to evade campaign contribution limits designed to prevent corruption and the appearance of corruption.

Alongside the rise of super PACs, the nation has also witnessed foreign corporate money flowing into our elections as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2010 ruling in *Citizens United v. FEC*, which swept away longstanding precedent barring corporate money in our political process. For example, in May 2016, Uber teamed up with fellow ride-hailing service Lyft to drench Austin, Texas, in \$9

million worth of election spending in the hope of overturning a city law requiring drivers to submit to fingerprint-based criminal background checks. Then, just weeks later, Uber disclosed an unprecedented \$3.5 billion investment from the Saudi Arabian government, meaning that the Kingdom owns more than five percent of the company, along with a seat on its board of directors. And, in 2014, Chevron spent over \$3 million backing city council and mayoral candidates in Richmond, Calif., a city half the size of St. Petersburg. Chevron — a multinational corporation whose stock ownership changes by the minute — was at the time facing a multimillion-dollar lawsuit from the city over a refinery fire that caused more than 15,000 people to seek medical treatment.

Free Speech For People, a national non-profit public interest organization founded on the day of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling, helped to draft the ordinance and worked with a broad coalition of groups in St. Petersburg, including American Promise-Tampa Bay and the League of Women Voters of the St. Petersburg Area, to press for its passage.

“The City of St. Petersburg is leading the way in the fight to reclaim our democracy,” says John Bonifaz, the Co-Founder and President of Free Speech For People. “Today’s vote by the St. Petersburg City Council marks a huge victory for the people all across the city who have stood up to demand an end to super PACs and foreign-influenced corporations threatening the integrity of their local elections. This ordinance will be a model for communities throughout the nation on how to fight big money in politics and defend the promise of American self-government. Free Speech For People congratulates the St. Petersburg City Council on this historic vote, and we thank the many grassroots activists and citizens of St. Petersburg who have worked tirelessly to achieve this victory.”

Free Speech For People is also working to advance this model law in other states, with pending bills in the Massachusetts Legislature and with legislative interest in Connecticut and California as well.