



For Immediate Release

DATE: November 2, 2017

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TOP NEW YORK LAWYER TO DEFEND ORDINANCE ABOLISHING SUPER PACS AND FOREIGN CORPORATE MONEY IN ELECTIONS, PRO BONO

Known for Winning Landmark Marriage Equality Case Before the Supreme Court, David Boies Lends His Firm and His Expertise to New Model Law Taking On Big Money in Politics

First of its kind in the nation, the ordinance abolishing super PACs and ending foreign corporate money in local elections to go into effect January 1, 2018 in St. Petersburg, FL

NEW YORK CITY, NY – November 2, 2017 – David Boies, and his firm Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, have agreed to represent the City of St. Petersburg, Florida pro bono if a lawsuit is filed to try to stop the city’s Defend Our Democracy ordinance from going into effect. Starting January 1, 2018, the new law will prohibit foreign-influenced corporations from making expenditures in local elections. The law will also establish limits on contributions to political action committees, thereby abolishing super PACs in local elections.

Best known for his role in *Bush v. Gore*, where he represented Vice President Al Gore before the U.S. Supreme Court in the contested Florida vote count following the 2000 presidential election, and *Hollingsworth v. Perry*, where he helped to win a judgement that ultimately led to the Supreme Court recognizing the constitutional right for marriage equality, David Boies is one of the most accomplished practicing lawyers in the United States.

“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. “David Boies’s commitment to defend St. Petersburg’s ordinance pro bono affirms that this law 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.”

“The City of St. Petersburg is responsibly preparing to keep big money out of our elections,” says St. Petersburg City Council Chairwoman, Darden Rice. “We have taken the necessary steps to ensure that we have adequate support to protect this important ordinance. We are honored to have

the pro bono assistance of David Boies and his law firm in our shared interest in defending more effective election laws to preserve our democracy.”

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 not ruled 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 money flowing through corporations and 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.

On October 5, 2017, the St. Petersburg City Council, by a vote of 6-2, enacted the Defend Our Democracy ordinance, following a 15 month grassroots campaign. The law will go into effect January 1, 2018.

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.

Free Speech For People is 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.