

Resolution No. [Resolution Number] [Type]

Report: [Report] Date Submitted: [Date Submitted]

Submitted By: Dr. Steve Saxe, Delegate, Nevada

Reference Committee: [Reference Committee for Worksheet]

Total Net Financial Implication: [Total Net Financial Impl.] Net Dues Impact:

Amount One-time: Amount On-going:

ADA Strategic Forecast Outcome: Tripartite: Achieve a stable and successful Tripartite.

## ENSURING FAIR AND EQUITABLE ADA ELECTIONS THROUGH CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

### Background:

The American Dental Association currently places no limits on how much a candidate for national office may raise or receive in campaign contributions. While financial disclosures are required, the absence of contribution caps creates the potential for financial advantage to substitute for merit-based leadership selection.

1. The ADA Governance and Organizational Manual requires candidates to submit a Campaign Finance Summary disclosing expenditures and contributions, but it imposes no restrictions on the amount or source of contributions [1].
2. Candidates may receive unlimited financial support from individuals, organizations, or affiliated entities, including those with vested interests in ADA policy decisions [1].
3. In recent ADA elections, state dental societies have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to candidates from their own trustee districts. For example, the Illinois State Dental Society contributed \$25,000 to a candidate in a recent election, and the New York State Dental Association transferred \$40,000 in surplus campaign funds to support a new nominee. Illinois is reportedly considering increasing its contribution to \$50,000 in future cycles. While such support reflects home-state loyalty, the absence of contribution limits creates a structurally unfair advantage over candidates from less-resourced districts.
4. The ADA's governance structure is particularly vulnerable to financial imbalance. Because the Association does not use a popular vote system and most candidates run within trustee districts, unrestricted fundraising can disproportionately benefit individuals from high-resource regions, undermining equal access for members from smaller or under-resourced states.
5. This situation creates not only potential inequities but also the **appearance of undue influence**, which can erode trust in ADA governance, discourage member participation, and reduce the perceived legitimacy of elected leaders.
6. No major professional associations like the American Bar Association or American Medical Association currently impose contribution caps for internal elections [2]. However, many academic, nonprofit, and public institutions do cap internal campaign

1 donations or expenditures for fairness, including the University of California and the City  
2 University of New York student and faculty governance systems [3].

- 3 7. IRS guidance under §501(c)(6) cautions that “when an organization’s governing structure  
4 or practices appear to concentrate decision-making authority or obstruct member  
5 oversight, this may indicate operation for private rather than public purposes” [4]. ADA  
6 election practices that allow unlimited contributions without public checks may expose  
7 the Association to compliance scrutiny or whistleblower complaints via IRS Form 13909.  
8 8. This resolution does **not limit candidate spending** or self-funded expenditures, which  
9 are protected under *Buckley v. Valeo* [5]. It only limits **contributions received from**  
10 **third parties**, a legally permissible approach that aligns with public sector practices and  
11 nonprofit integrity standards.  
12 9. The ADA has long positioned itself as a leader in public health and professional ethics.  
13 By implementing modest, reasonable campaign contribution caps—\$2,500 per  
14 individual, \$5,000 per organization, and \$15,000 from a candidate’s home state  
15 association—the Association can lead the nonprofit sector in advancing transparent and  
16 equitable campaign finance practices.  
17 10. With the widespread availability of digital platforms, social media, and virtual events, the  
18 cost of reaching members across the country has decreased significantly. Modern  
19 campaigns can engage the electorate through low-cost online town halls, podcasts, and  
20 social content, reducing the need for large fundraising efforts. There are reports that the  
21 money spent on some ADA national campaigns rivals or exceeds what many general  
22 dentists—particularly younger dentists—earn in a year. This level of spending risks  
23 portraying the ADA as out of touch with the very members it aims to represent and  
24 attract, especially those early in their careers who are navigating debt, burnout, and  
25 financial uncertainty.  
26 11. In addition to limits, some organizations have adopted positive reforms such as voluntary  
27 donor-matching programs. These allow candidates who agree to enhanced transparency  
28 to receive matching funds for small-dollar contributions. Such programs expand fairness  
29 without restricting speech and can help under-resourced candidates compete more  
30 effectively.  
31 12. These reforms are not only legally sound, but strategically necessary to preserve the  
32 ADA’s credibility, protect its tax-exempt status, and ensure that future elections reflect  
33 member engagement rather than fundraising advantage.  
34 13. By taking these proactive steps, the ADA can establish itself as a national leader in  
35 nonprofit electoral fairness, setting a precedent for other professional associations while  
36 rebuilding trust and engagement among future generations of dentists.

37 Resolved, that the American Dental Association establish a contribution limit for national office  
38 campaigns of \$2,500 per individual and \$5,000 per organization, per candidate, per election  
39 cycle, except that a candidate’s home state dental association may contribute up to \$15,000; and  
40 be it further resolved,

41 that all campaign expenditures and contributions—including in-kind support and self-funding—  
42 be reported in a standardized Campaign Finance Summary submitted quarterly to the Election  
43 Commission and published for member access no later than 14 days prior to the annual House of

Delegates session; that a plain-language disclosure of each candidate's total fundraising, top donors, and percentage of funding from home-state organizations also be included; and that failure to comply with these requirements shall disqualify a candidate from continuing their campaign or seeking office until full compliance is achieved; and be it further resolved,

that the ADA Election Commission develop and implement additional campaign equity safeguards no later than the start of the 2026 election cycle, including options such as contribution caps by category, enhanced financial transparency tools, and centralized public reporting, to help ensure candidates from under-resourced states are not disadvantaged by large-scale institutional contributions; and be it further resolved,

that the ADA establish a voluntary donor matching program beginning with the 2026 election cycle, in which qualifying small-dollar contributions to eligible candidates may be matched from a centrally administered fund, provided that participating candidates agree to enhanced transparency and equity rules, and that the Election Commission be directed to design, implement, and publish guidelines for this program no later than March 1, 2026; and be it further resolved,

that the ADA Board of Trustees assign oversight of these campaign finance reforms to the ADA Election Commission in consultation with the Council on Ethics, Bylaws and Judicial Affairs (CEBJA), and that all related rules and procedures be published in the ADA Campaign Rules and Governance Manual by March 1, 2026.

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## References:

[1] *2025 Governance and Organizational Manual of the American Dental Association*, Campaign Rules and Finance Summary Requirements.

[2] *American Bar Association Election Guidelines* ([www.americanbar.org](http://www.americanbar.org)); *American Medical Association Elections Manual* ([www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)).

[3] *University of California Office of the President Guidelines on Campus Elections*; *CUNY Governance and Elections Rules* ([www.cuny.edu](http://www.cuny.edu)).

[4] *Internal Revenue Code §501(c)(6)*; *IRS Exempt Organizations Manual*, Election and Governance Section (<https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici03.pdf>).

[5] *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1 (1976), U.S. Supreme Court.