



PACs and Clean Elections

Political Action Committees, or PACs, are funds created when people and organizations pool their money to achieve a political goal. PACs are subject to disclosure regulations so that the public can see who is behind political spending on ballot initiatives and outside spending in candidate races.

While PACs are generally not stand-alone organizations, some organizations do raise and spend a significant amount of money directly on campaigns. When that happens, those organizations also must file reports for the sake of transparency.

Often candidates for office participate in PAC activity to pursue a goal beyond their own election. Some examples are PACs that promote women running for office, supporting certain issues such as the environment, gun rights or economic development. Often it is legislators who aspire to leadership positions in their caucus who engage in PAC activity. They may raise money through their own leadership PAC or for the larger caucus PAC. In both cases the idea is to help their caucus gain or keep a majority in the upcoming Legislature. PACs hold fundraisers and solicit money from individuals, organizations and businesses.

Whether a candidate uses private or public funding for their own campaign, participating in PAC activity is legal as long as the PAC does not directly benefit the candidate's own campaign.

Every two years, Maine media outlets report that some candidates have PACs. Clean Election candidates are publicly criticized for engaging in this fundraising activity, and there is some concern that privately funded candidates use PACs to evade the contribution limit in their own election race.

MCCE believes that PACs remain a legitimate concern for Maine people because contributions to PACs are not limited at all, and the largest contributions often come from the special interests that are not allowed to play a large role in candidate campaigns any more. MCCE believes that the transparency provided by PACs is valuable to the public and that PAC activity is a legitimate expression of the First Amendment rights of speech and association that our Constitution grants. In our view, imposing a reasonable contribution limit on contributions to PACs should be the first step in reforming our PAC system in order to prevent the corruption and undue influence that could flow from the current system and its unlimited contributions.

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Member Organizations

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, EqualityMaine, League of Women Voters of Maine, League of Young Voters, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Council of Churches, Maine People's Alliance/Maine People's Resource Center, Maine State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1989, Maine Women's Lobby, NAACP Portland, Sierra Club Maine Chapter