

Lawmakers Mull Changes to Clean Elections Fund

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With about two dozen candidates running for governor, Maine lawmakers are trying to figure out what to do if the state's Clean Elections fund runs short of cash. Candidates can opt to publicly-fund their campaigns, but right now they're barred from raising private funds. Members of the Legislature's Legal and Veterans Affairs Committee are considering a plan that would loosen that requirement.

"They can go to anyone they want, including corporations, pacs, labor unions, party committees and so forth," said Jonathan Wayne, who heads the Maine Ethics Commission, the agency that administers the law. "We hope we're never in the position, but I think it's a very good point that they might want to turn to organizations, instead of individuals, especially if the gubernatorial candidates have to raise \$50,000 or \$100,000."

But at least one member of the committee questioned the change. Rep. Linda Valentino, a Saco Democrat, said the it poses a threat to the viability of the fund. "By having this in law the Legislature can fall back on this and say, 'Well, if we don't fund the Maine Clean Election Fund, then we have a mechanism in law that says you can go out and raise your own private money.' That's what I disagree with."

The Committee is considering the proposal as emergency legislation to take effect in time for this year's June primary elections.