



PRESS RELEASE

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Senate Passes Bill to Ensure Adequate 2016 Clean Elections Funding with Super Majority

AUGUSTA – In a 26 – 9 vote, the Maine State Senate passed LD 1579 today, a bill that will provide \$500,000 in advanced funding to Maine's Clean Election Fund. This bill would require no new spending.

"Reducing the influence of wealthy special interest money in our elections isn't a Democratic or Republican issue – it's an issue at the core of democracy – and that was proven today when a supermajority of lawmakers from both sides of the aisle in the State Senate came together to ensure funding for Clean Election so the program will remain solvent for the 2016 election," said Maine Citizens for Clean Elections Action Executive Director, Andrew Bossie. "Though we would have liked to see lawmakers pay back the \$1.7 million raided from the Clean Election Fund in 2015, we are encouraged by the bipartisan compromise that was struck and urge Governor LePage to follow the Senate's lead and stay true to the will of Maine voters by signing the bill into law."

Without the advanced funding, Maine's Clean Election Fund could run dry this election cycle because of years of legislative funding raids to the program. Since 1996, \$9.8 million has been raided from the Clean Elections Fund, with only \$3.1 million of that amount ever repaid. A net amount of more than \$6.0 million is owed to the fund. The most recent raid totaling \$1.7 million occurred in 2015, after the recent Clean Elections Initiative (also known as Question 1 on the 2015 ballot) was already on its way to the ballot.

Advocates have been urging lawmakers to pay back the \$1.7 million raided from the fund in 2015. In recent days, lawmakers instead struck a bipartisan compromise to advance \$500,000 of Clean Election funding appropriated for 2017 to ensure the fund does not run dry in the 2016 election cycle. This legislation requires no new spending.

In the event that adequate funding is not secured before the adjournment of the legislature, it would mark the first time in the history of the program -- since the legislature started "borrowing" from the fund -- that they have allowed the fund to head into an election season with the funding in jeopardy. Advocates are very concerned about the ramifications of the fund running short for candidates and voters alike, especially so soon after voters reaffirmed their mandate on a strong Clean Elections law at the polls.

The bill now faces additional enactment votes in the House and Senate and then heads to the governor's desk.