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Twice as Many Voters Supported their Candidate with Clean Election Qualifying Contributions in 2016 than in 2014

PORTLAND, ME – Twice as many Maine voters have made qualifying contributions to Clean Elections candidates in the 2016 elections compared to the 2014 elections. Based on an analysis of the most recently filed campaign finance reports, at least 33,000 Maine voters have made \$5 qualifying contributions to their candidates for state legislature a year after voters reaffirmed their support for Clean Elections via citizen initiative.

“The updated Clean Elections option is proving to be a successful alternative to big-money campaigns. These small contributions show that Mainers want to remain in charge of who pays for our democracy,” said Andrew Bossie, Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. “While privately funded campaigns are largely funded by a few wealthy donors – often representing lobbyists or out-of-state special interests – Clean Elections campaigns are centered around voter contact and participation.”

Passed by voters at referendum in 1996, the Maine Clean Election Act permits candidates for state office to use public funding and local voter support to finance their campaign as an alternative to private fundraising. To initially qualify, candidates for the House must collect \$5 qualifying contributions in the form of checks or money orders from 60 registered voters in their district, while candidates for the Senate must collect 175 \$5 qualifying contributions. To receive public funds, Clean Election candidates must also agree to strict spending limits and are not allowed to raise private donations or spend their own money on their campaign.

Clean Elections has been popular with voters and candidates alike. Participation peaked in 2008 when 85% of legislators used the program to finance their races. Participation declined in recent years after the program was weakened by a series of Supreme Court decisions and legislative inaction that removed triggered matching funds, a component of the law meant to keep Clean Elections candidates competitive in high-spending races.

Responding to this challenge, Maine voters passed a referendum in 2015 that strengthened the Maine Clean Election Act by allowing qualified candidates access to additional funding. The changes in the law allow candidates to receive limited supplemental funding during the general election by collecting more \$5 qualifying contributions from unique voters in their district.

[Participation in Clean Elections among 2016 legislative candidates is now at 62%.](#) That is up from the lowest participation rate in a decade, when 53% of candidates used Clean Elections in 2014 under the weakened law. MCCE credits the voter-approved changes in the law as the reason for increased participation.

“Maine has a long tradition of strong participation in civic life – we have some of the highest voter-turn out in the country, we participate in town meetings, and we stand up for the right to vote. We can also be proud of our strong Clean Election law and the increased participation by both candidates and voters alike,” said Bossie.

