



For Immediate Release

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Senate Takes First Step to Weaken Maine Clean Election Law

Advocates call on legislature to amend measure with budget neutral “requalifying” option.

Today the Maine Senate accepted the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee’s “do-nothing” option (LD 1774) to address the U.S. Supreme Court’s invalidation of a key provision in the Maine Clean Election Act, taking the first step towards weakening Clean Elections and allowing more special interest money in Maine elections. The Senate will vote again on the measure next Tuesday, March 6th.

The Maine Clean Election Act was approved overwhelmingly by voters in 1996 so that community-supported candidates could compete against wealthy opponents with close ties to special interests. Maine voters understood that candidates would need the ability to fight back in expensive, hotly contested races, and supported the matching funds provision in the original law.

“When the court invalidated part of the law, the legislature had the responsibility to comply with the court decision in a way that respects the clear intention of the voters. Instead, the Senate took a step today to eliminate matching funds but made no effort to replace that provision,” said Andrew Bossie, Executive Director of MCCE. “Fortunately there is a strong amendment that will be put forward next week.”

In 2011, after a thorough public review of the law and consideration of many possible policy alternatives, the nonpartisan Ethics Commission proposed a solution that addressed the court decision without any additional cost to taxpayers. “Maine people worked hard to come up with a budget-neutral solution that would retain the viability of Clean Elections,” said Maine Citizens for Clean Elections Board President Alison Smith. “On Tuesday the Senate will have a chance to adopt the ‘requalifying’ option which MCCE and many others strongly support.”

Yesterday, MCCE and other advocates of Maine’s Clean Election laws held an event at the State House where they presented more than 5,000 petition signatures from Maine people urging the legislature to keep Clean Election laws strong.

Former Republican Sen. Ed Youngblood spoke in favor of the requalifying option. “Our Clean Elections law needs an update, and there is a fully-vetted, well-supported option at hand. Passing the Maine Ethics Commission recommended re-qualifying option will keep Clean Elections strong, as voters intended,” he said. “Doing nothing will strengthen special interests in Augusta, and that is the wrong direction for Maine.”

“It has been just 15 years since the people demanded Clean Elections,” said Bossie. “The 125th Maine Legislature has an opportunity to strengthen Clean Elections for the next generation. A series of amendments to LD 1774 will be taken up next week, and we strongly encourage lawmakers to fulfill the will of Maine voters by supporting the Ethics Commission’s requalifying option.”

Adoption of the “re-qualifying option” would allow participating candidates to receive supplemental funding after they successfully complete one or two additional rounds of collecting Qualifying Contributions – the \$5 donations that local voters make to help a candidate qualify for public funding. Without access to additional resources candidates in competitive races may opt to privately finance their campaigns, and participating candidates will be more vulnerable to outside spending.

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