



**For Immediate Release**

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**Senate Votes to Weaken Maine Clean Election Law**

**Attempts to replace Matching Funds with budget-neutral “re-qualifying” option fail.**

Today the Maine Senate voted to eliminate the matching funds portion of Maine’s Clean Election Act (LD 1774) and rejected a proposal that would have replaced matching funds and kept the system whole. The vote was necessary because a court invalidated this provision in 2011. If the bill passes and is enacted in its present form it will weaken Clean Elections and allow more big-money wealthy and corporate influence in Maine elections.

Today’s action, combined with the doubling of the contribution limits for governor in the first session, makes the 125<sup>th</sup> legislature the first to substantially weaken our citizen-initiated public financing program.

“At a time when people are more concerned than ever about the corrupting role that money plays in our elections and our government, the Maine Senate has moved in the wrong direction. For ten years we have had a campaign finance system that puts voters, not big-money campaign donors, first, and this has made Maine the envy of the nation,” said Andrew Bossie, Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. “Maine people want to continue to move forward, not backward, in the fight against money in politics, and today the Maine Senate failed the people they represent.”

The Maine Clean Election Act was approved overwhelmingly by voters in 1996 so that community-supported candidates could compete against wealthy opponents and those with close ties to special interests. The original law included a system of supplemental funds that allowed candidates to fight back in expensive, hotly contested races.

In September of 2011, after several months of review and public comment, the nonpartisan Ethics Commission proposed a “re-qualifying option” that would comply with the court decision and keep Clean Elections viable for candidates in all types of races. Sensitive to the tough budget times facing Maine, the Commission found a budget-neutral solution that addressed the court decision while remaining true to the original program. Attempts to amend LD 1774 with the “re-qualifying amendment” failed when a motion to indefinitely postpone the amendment passed in a vote of 18 – 15.

Adoption of the “re-qualifying option” would allow participating candidates to receive supplemental funding after successfully completing 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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