



For Immediate Release

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**House Votes to Weaken Maine Clean Election Law
As Governor Proposes Raiding Clean Election Fund**

Attempts to replace matching funds with budget-neutral “re-qualifying” option fail, advocates appalled by Governor’s attempt to raid fund of voluntary contributions from Maine people.

On the heels of last week’s Senate vote, the Maine House of Representatives voted to eliminate the matching funds portion of Maine’s Clean Election Act (LD 1774) today and rejected a proposal that would have replaced it with an alternative recommended by the state’s Ethics Commission. The vote was necessary because the Supreme Court invalidated the matching provision last summer.

“Make no doubt about it, lawmakers are weakening Clean Elections. The House and Senate have used a Supreme Court case as an excuse to dismantle our citizen-initiated law when a perfectly suitable budget-neutral replacement option is on the table. You’ve got to ask yourself why some in Augusta want to take a step backward and allow more big-money and corporate influence in our elections and government,” said Andrew Bossie, Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections.

Late yesterday a supplemental budget outline was released by the Governor’s office that proposes raiding the Clean Election Fund of \$2.45 million over the remainder of the biennium. “This is yet another assault on our citizen-initiated law that was put in place to ensure government of, by, and for the people,” said Bossie. “Thousands of Maine people have voluntarily given their own money to the Clean Election fund to keep our government accountable to voters, not wealthy special interests. And now the governor wants to use this money for his own policy priorities.”

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. It also included a separate, dedicated fund, supported in part by voluntary contributions from Maine people, to ensure adequate resources to administer the Clean Election program.

Maine was the first state to adopt a Clean Election law and has been cited as a model for addressing the dysfunction in Washington DC. Nearly 80% of currently sitting lawmakers in Augusta used Clean Elections to win their seats and the program has enjoyed high levels of participation from all parties. “The votes in both the House and Senate this week, combined with the proposed raiding of the Clean Election Fund, would make this government the first to really gut our citizen-initiated Clean Election law and the Fund that sustains it,” added Bossie.

In September of 2011, after several months of review and public comment, the nonpartisan Ethics Commission proposed a “re-qualifying option” to replace the matching funds portion of the law that was struck down by the court. This option would comply with the court decision while remaining true to the

original program by keeping Clean Elections viable for candidates in all types of races. Sensitive to the tough budget times facing Maine, the option would not add any additional cost to the program. Attempts to amend LD 1774 with the “re-qualifying amendment” failed when a motion to indefinitely postpone the amendment passed on a largely party line vote.

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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