



**For Immediate Release**

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**Initiative to Strengthen Clean Elections Submitted to Secretary of State**

Augusta, ME - Maine Citizens for Clean Elections announced today that six Maine citizens have begun the process to qualify a citizen-initiated bill for the ballot. The legislation aims to strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act, increase transparency, and close loopholes in Maine's campaign finance laws.

Ann Luther, President of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, submitted the application at the Office of the Secretary of State. She was joined by five more Maine voters as required by Maine law. The other signers are Ben Claeson of Bangor, a student at Bates College; Bill Curran of South Portland, a Claims Associate at Disability RMS; Emma Halas-O'Connor of Portland, Grassroots Advocacy Coordinator at the Environmental Health Strategy Center; Carmen Lavertu of Thomaston, retired; and Edward Youngblood of Brewer, a retired banker currently serving in the State Senate.

"Today, Maine people are taking the lead. The Clean Election system, successful for more than a decade, has been compromised by court rulings, legislative action, budget raids, gubernatorial vetoes, and more," said Luther. "I am proud to stand with fellow citizens who are committed to reducing the influence of special interest money in our elections and in our government."

Halas-O'Connor expressed her support for Clean Elections and for replacing the matching funds system that was struck down by a court. "Maine's political system is open and inclusive, and that's largely because of Clean Elections," she said. "This bill will make sure that the system remains viable for all qualified candidates well into the future."

Claeson, who has begun the process to start a student group on campaign finance at Bates College, said, "It's important to enhance the role that citizens play in our democracy. Clean Elections provides fair and equal footing, and I am proud to be a part of Maine's continuing leadership role."

Much of the initiative was approved by the legislature this year, but several elements were vetoed by the governor, and one section was not funded.

"Every effort to provide transparency in the coming election has been thwarted in Augusta," said Lavertu. "It's time for citizens to step up and get it done."

Senator Youngblood sponsored legislation to replace matching funds with an alternative system of optional supplemental funding. "We did our best, and we passed this legislation with a bipartisan majority," said Youngblood. "But the failure to provide adequate funding means that the Clean Election system has been diminished once again. Thanks to this initiative, citizens will have a chance to reverse

the growing role of private special interest money in Maine politics and restore the system they put into place back in 1996.”

Curran expressed his desire for a future where politicians don’t view big money as the only path to election. “We do not want a future where everyday citizens are not able to compete with those backed by the special interests.” He concluded, “We do want a future that allows the voice of the individual to be heard over the roar of big money on the issues that affect Mainers.”

The Secretary of State has 15 days to review the application at which time he will either reject it or provide a first draft. The applicant and the Secretary of State can then make revisions to the draft.

Luther predicted that petitions would be circulating some time in September. “Maine people take their responsibilities seriously when it comes to elections and campaign finance, and we expect there will be a lot of interest in this initiative,” she said. “Every Maine person has a stake in a government that is transparent, accountable, and free of corruption and undue influence. It will be a lot of work to collect the necessary signatures, but I know that Maine voters are up to the challenge.”

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