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Citizens Announce Clean Elections Initiative

Measure will strengthen Clean Elections, increase transparency, and bolster accountability in Maine's campaign finance laws.

Augusta, ME – Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) gathered Clean Election supporters at the State House Welcome Center this morning to introduce a new Clean Elections initiative

The initiative is titled “An Act to Strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act, Improve Disclosure and Make Other Changes to the Campaign Finance Laws.” The group expects to begin circulating petitions this month.

Several of the citizen signers of the initiative were on hand, as well as members of organizations that have endorsed the Clean Elections initiative.

“Today is about Maine citizens taking the lead,” said Ann Luther of Trenton, MCCE’s board president, a member of the League of Women Voters of Maine, and the initiative’s lead signer. “The Clean Elections Initiative builds on the success of the past and strengthens Clean Elections for the future. This is an effort for those who believe that everyone should be represented in a democracy, not just the wealthy; for those who believe the power belongs in the hands of everyday people; and for those who believe that all of us deserve to have elected representatives who are accountable to us.”

Luther outlined the initiative, which includes a replacement for the Clean Elections matching funds system that was struck down in the courts, several elements to increase transparency, and other provisions to bolster accountability. The bill calls for cutting low-performing corporate tax loopholes that have not proven their value in order to fund the program.

Citing the legislature’s failure to enact a similar bill during the 126th Legislature, despite bipartisan support, Senator Ed Youngblood (R-Brewer) said, “We can’t continue to diminish Clean Elections and expect to have a viable law. Thanks to the Clean Elections initiative, Maine citizens now have the chance to reverse the growing role of special interest money in Maine elections.” He continued, “The new transparency provisions will let voters know who is behind the so-called independent expenditures that play an increasing role in Maine elections. This is important, as voters need to know who is trying to influence their vote, and they need to know it before Election Day.” Youngblood is one of the six citizen signers of the initiative.

Calling Clean Elections, “one of the best things about Maine,” Emma Halas-O’Connor of Portland, another citizen signer, said, “It has been discouraging to see this successful program diminished little by little. But it is very encouraging to see Maine people stand up for the future of Clean Elections, and

exciting to be part of this movement. The Clean Elections initiative is our best chance to restore, strengthen, and ensure the success of Clean Elections for the next generation of Mainers.”

Representing Common Cause, an endorsing partner in the Clean Election initiative, was Arn Pearson who is Vice President for Program and Litigation at the organization. Pearson was instrumental in the first Clean Election initiative and with MCCE’s efforts to defend and implement the law in the decade after its passage. “For almost twenty years, Maine’s highly successful Clean Elections reform enjoyed bipartisan support and inspired people around the country by showing that there’s a better way to pay for elections,” Pearson said. “But the sad reality is that the current Supreme Court has turned back the clock on campaign reform to the days of the Robber Barons, and our elected leaders have failed to make the needed fixes for Clean Elections to keep pace. Now it’s time for the people of Maine to speak out again and make sure we have Clean Elections for the next generation of Maine voters and candidates. Elections belong to ALL of us, not millionaires and powerful special interests.”

The group plans to begin circulating petitions this month. Volunteer signature-gatherers began signing up months ago, and the group hopes to collect 70,000 from Maine voters in the next eight months.

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