



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
LD 1583 – An Act to Enact the Maine Citizens’ Initiatives Clean Election Act.

April 24, 2019

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 1583 – An Act to Enact the Maine Citizens’ Initiatives Clean Election Act.

My name is Bob Howe of Howe Cahill. I am here today on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. We are pleased to testify in favor of LD 1561. We commend Representative Corey for bringing forward this bill.

In candidate races, public funding ensures that good candidates can have a shot at running for office even if they don’t have deep pockets. It also promotes issue-oriented campaigns and direct discussions about what our state needs to move forward. It helps mitigate the role of big money coming in from out of state.

We have now had Clean Elections for ten election cycles, and it remains a widely supported answer to the undemocratic influence of big money in campaigns.

LD 1583 is based on the same idea as the Clean Election Act – that campaign funding that comes with no strings attached can improve our elections and allow our democracy to thrive. When taxpayer funding is used, our elections are accountable to the taxpayers. We think that many of the principles that underlie the Clean Election Act also apply in the case of citizen initiatives.

There is no better way to get big money out than by providing an opportunity for small donations to fund campaign speech. Empowering ordinary people to pitch in and pool their donations to leverage limited public funding for initiatives is an exciting idea. Voters, not big-money donors, should always be in the driver’s seat in our elections, and this could be another tool in Maine’s democracy tool kit. Just as the Clean Election Act has contributed to more competition in candidate races, a system like this can also help create a more robust public dialog around initiatives, providing the opportunity for both sides in an initiative campaign to get their message out.

Like the Clean Elections system used for candidates, we believe that public funding for citizen initiatives must be transparent, accountable, limited, and provided only when a campaign shows significant public support. We believe LD 1583 meets those tests.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer questions or provide additional information for the work session.