



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 1780 – An Act to Transfer Funds to the Maine Clean Election Fund to Provide Adequate Funding for Maine Clean Election Fund Candidates.

February 14, 2018

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 1780 – An Act to Transfer Funds to the Maine Clean Election Fund to Provide Adequate Funding for Maine Clean Election Fund Candidates.

My name is Anna Kellar, and I am here today on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. We are pleased to testify in favor of LD 1780.

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.

Before long we will celebrate 20 years of Clean Elections in candidate races. Clean Election participation is high, and there is much to celebrate:

- Eleven members of this Committee have run at least one race using Clean Elections, and taken together, you all have run nearly 30 campaigns with the support of small contributors and the Clean Elections Fund. That represents 30 campaigns where your constituents did not have to even wonder whether private special interest money was involved.
- As of late yesterday, 117 House candidates and 42 Senate candidates are seeking Clean Election funding in the 2018 cycle. That number will grow as more candidates register.
- This year nine gubernatorial candidates are seeking Clean Election funding including members of all major parties and a prominent independent candidate. This is the highest number since the start of Clean Elections.

With this robust participation, we do have to pay attention to the Clean Election Fund. The original Clean Election law and the revised law from 2015 both established annual funding levels for Clean Elections. Those levels did a good job of anticipating the need to use the Fund. Over

the years, however, the legislature has not allocated the full amount of funding that voters asked for. Most recently, in 2014 the shortfall in the amount provided was \$1.7 million.

Historically, the legislature has assured the public that despite the occasions when full funding according to the statutory levels was not appropriated, if ever the circumstances required more funding, it would be provided. To date, the legislature has always kept its word: the Fund has never run dry during a active election cycle.

Because of the uncertainty in the need for funds, the 2015 initiative set forth a goal of a 20% margin for the Clean Election Fund – much like many other funds used by other state agencies. The funding in LD 1780 would help ensure that a safe margin exists for the current cycle.

Although we understand that Executive Director Wayne has reduced the dollar amount in LD 1780, we continue to advocate for return of the full \$1.7 million. Over the years, lawmakers have taken a net of more than \$6 million out of the Clean Election Fund and used it for other purposes. It's time to return that money and ensure the program that voters overwhelmingly support is solvent - starting with the \$1.7 million taken from the Fund in 2015. That is what LD 1780 would do. Candidates - legislative as well as gubernatorial – will then be able to be confident that the funding for which they qualify will be available.

Clean Elections is about owning our democracy. The funding represented by LD 1780 is not too great a price to pay.

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