



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 202 - An Act To Increase the Required Number of Qualifying Contributions Gubernatorial Candidates Must Obtain To Qualify as Maine Clean Election Act Candidates

February 11, 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 202 - An Act To Increase the Required Number of Qualifying Contributions Gubernatorial Candidates Must Obtain To Qualify as Maine Clean Election Act Candidates.

My name is Anna Kellar. I am the Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections has been the leading campaign finance organization in Maine for over twenty years, and one of the nation's most respected state-based organizations advocating for democratically funded elections. We are proud of our national reputation. But we are all Mainers, and our mission has always been with and for the people of this state.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections strongly opposes LD 202.

This bill would increase the number of qualifying contributions a gubernatorial candidate must receive to be certified as a Maine Clean Election Act candidate from 3,200 to 6,000.

It is our position that raising the qualifying contribution threshold from 3,200 to 6,000 would shut down the gubernatorial Clean Elections program altogether and that the legislature ought not undo the good work done with the 2015 Clean Elections Initiative.

We believe that this bill and all legislation in this area should be measured by how well they honor and respect the will of Maine people expressed in the decisive vote on Clean Elections in November 2015 and by whether they address an actual need. The legislature must be wary of solutions looking for problems, especially in cases where proposals are inconsistent with the voters' resolve. This bill would move in the opposite direction of what the voters approved. Above all else, voters wanted to preserve and protect Clean Elections, not damage it by making it unreasonably difficult for candidates to qualify for funding under the Maine Clean Elections Act.

Some important points to think about as you consider the legislation before you: It is already difficult to qualify for Clean Election funds; the existing limit requires broad popular support and a strong campaign organization. The requirements laid out in the Maine Clean Elections Act, twice approved by voters, has worked well for years; in 2018 a Democrat, a Republican, and an independent each qualified and ran credible campaigns. We doubt that any of them could have qualified under this proposal. We ask this committee to reject a barrier to entry so high that no one other than a front-runner could qualify for funds.

Campaign data from 2018 show that neither Garrett Mason (R), Betsy Sweet (D), nor Terry Hayes (I) - the three gubernatorial candidates who qualified for Clean Elections funding - were able to get to 6,000 qualifying contributions (QCs), including supplemental QCs, even with more time allotted than would be allowed under the bill with an April deadline.

The data and the experience of candidates and voters in the 2018 cycle show that the Clean Election system is working as intended, and the number of qualifying contributions required of gubernatorial candidates is just about right. There is no evidence to justify nearly doubling the number of qualifying contributions required by Clean Elections candidates for governor. There is, however, plenty of evidence that Maine people want a robust Clean Election system that is viable for candidates. We urge you to vote ought not to pass to honor the will of the voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to take questions.