



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 543 – An Act Regarding Political Action Committee Expenditures

February 27, 2017

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 543 – An Act Regarding Political Action Committee Expenditures.

My name is Andrew Bossie. 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.

We strongly support LD 543 for the following reasons.

Political action committees were first created to allow a large number of contributors to pool their funds together in order to have a greater impact on political campaigns than the typical person on the street could have. A PAC is a mechanism for ensuring accountability and transparency in transactions meant to influence political campaigns. It is an important part of our reporting system.

Since then, the practical uses of political action committees have morphed in many ways. We will be discussing some of the unintended consequences of the law that created PACs later in the legislative session in connection with a bill that has not yet been printed.

PACs were never intended – and should not be permitted – to function as a discretionary fund for the unrestricted personal benefit of one person. In particular, where a candidate or elected official controls the PAC, that candidate or elected official should not use PAC funds to pay him- or herself a salary or otherwise receive compensation for personal services.

It is entirely appropriate to compensate campaign workers with PAC funds, and it is also appropriate to use PAC funds to reimburse any person for legitimate purchases or expenses. It is a very different matter to create a PAC, solicit funds, and then use those funds to pay oneself for the effort expended in connection with the PAC. Even where there is bona fide work performed, compensation from a PAC creates a strong impression that the candidate or elected official is personally benefitting from the money given by contributors.

Where the PAC is operated by someone who is not an elected official or candidate, this is arguably not the public's business. But when the PAC is operated by a candidate or elected official, this type of self-dealing is a serious concern.

No one is forced to have a PAC. If an elected official or candidate is so invested in a cause that he or she wishes to establish a PAC, then that person should be willing to donate their time on an uncompensated basis to carry out the objectives of the PAC.

We urge you to support LD 543 to ensure that nothing comes between our elected officials and their duty to their constituents.

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