

Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 722 An Act To Require Presidential and Vice-Presidential Candidates To Disclose
Their Federal Income Tax Returns

February 25, 2019

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

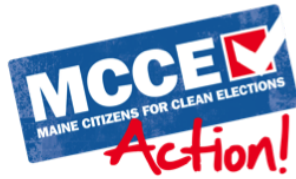
My name is Anna Kellar. I am the Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean
Elections and MCCE Action, and I testify in support of LD 722.

MCCE Action advocates for campaign finance laws, elections, and government that
serve the public interest, both in principle and in practice. We believe that LD 722
directly serves the public interest by providing a statutory framework for the disclosure
of important information that has become the norm in American presidential elections
over more than 40 years.

LD 722 recognizes that, while tax returns are private, there is a strong public interest in
the information provided in the returns of candidates for the highest offices in the
country. No one is compelled to enter the presidential race, and it is only by virtue of
this high-profile public action and the desire to appear on Maine's and other states'
ballots that the disclosure is required. The bill appropriately exempts sensitive private
information such as social security numbers.

There is no law that bars a taxpayer from making their return public. With few
exceptions, candidates for president and vice president have voluntarily released their
tax returns ever since the days of the Watergate investigation. But this disclosure has
been inconsistent in terms of how many years of returns are released, and not every
candidate has complied. LD 722 calls for the same disclosures by all candidates.

By enshrining this norm in law, LD 722 and the related laws under consideration in other
states guarantee the American people timely access to important information as they
consider who will serve in our highest offices. Sources and amount of income, amount
paid in taxes, charitable contributions, and whether taxes were paid to foreign
governments are all included in the returns. Such information could reveal potential
conflicts of interest and serve as an important accountability benchmark.



Richard Nixon, who voluntarily released his returns in the swirl of an IRS audit and allegations of tax cheating, rationalized his decision thus, "I welcome this kind of examination, because people have got to know whether or not their president is a crook. Well, I am not a crook."

That decision may not have worked out all that well for President Nixon, who ended up with an additional tax bill of almost half a million dollars (in addition to resigning from office in the wake of the Watergate cover-up), but it was important for the American people.

LD 722 provides appropriate disclosure that is squarely in the public interest, and we encourage a vote of Ought To Pass.

Thank you for your consideration.