

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections

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TO: The Honorable Senator Lisa T. Marraché, Senate Chair
The Honorable Representative John L. Patrick, House Chair
The Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

DATE: Wednesday, January 31st, 2007

RE: **LD 106** "An Act to Prohibit a Maine Clean Election Act Candidate from Participating in Political Action Committee Funding

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) opposes LD 106.

MCCE believes that strong campaign finance laws should work to reduce the influence of big money in government, eliminate corruption and the appearance of corruption, increase public access to information, and allow candidates to compete more equitably for public office. We hold that sound reform creates trust, encourages participation in our electoral system, and enhances the accountability of elected officials to their constituents.

Maine has been largely successful in getting the big money out of the campaigns of candidates for state office. That is because of two things: 1) An option for full public funding and 2) reasonable contribution limits for privately funded candidates.

We understand the concerns that are raised when candidates participating in the Clean Election public funding system also participate in fundraising for political action committees. Although there are only a few candidates in each cycle who choose to have a PAC, in too many instances PAC funds are raised from exactly the same special interest groups that our public funding system was designed to avoid.

While we understand and share these concerns, we object to the proposed solution. Were LD 106 to pass, candidates who wish to engage in the perfectly legal fundraising activities of PACs would simply opt out of the Clean Election system and raise private money for their own campaign and for PACs. This would in no way lessen the influence of big money on Maine politics, and so would have absolutely no benefit to Maine's citizens.

Unfortunately, big money still plays a role in Maine politics, mainly through political action committees, and that is largely because Maine has no contribution limits to PACs. We are unique in New England in this regard. MCCE believes the time is right

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections is a nonpartisan coalition of organizations that have worked together to pass Maine's Clean Election Act and that continue to work together to support and defend its use and the integrity of its implementation. Its members include AARP, Common Cause Maine, the League of Women Voters of Maine, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine People's Alliance and Peace Action Maine.

to look at the laws that govern PACs. We ask the Committee to look at the PAC system as a whole, and not simply at one class of candidates' participation in it. A quick look at the titles of bills that will come before you shows that there will be ample opportunity to do this.

The best reforms will lessen the influence of big money in Maine races, preserve the disclosure that PACs provide, and protect the First Amendment rights of speech and association that are the bedrock of our political system. We look forward to working with the Committee to advance these goals.