

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: April 23, 2007

RE: **LD 1499** "An Act to Improve the Clean Election Act"

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) opposes LD 1499.

MCCE objects to the doubling of the number of qualifying contributions that participating State Senate candidates must gather. There is no reason to believe that it is much too easy to qualify for certification in Maine Senate races.

We do believe that a 30% rise in the number of Qualifying Contributions would not harm the system and would ensure that it provides an adequate measure of support and viability for candidates into the future. We have recommended this in the gubernatorial race. If the committee is convinced that the number should be raised for State Senate races, we would ask that it consider a simple, across-the-board increase of 30% in all races.

	Current	30% Increase
Gubernatorial	2,500	3,250
Senate	150	195
House	50	65

This bill provides that participating candidate may accept what sounds like independent expenditures from an organization. This would effectively allow Clean Election Act candidates to accept contributions, since outside spending that is made in coordination with, or with the knowledge of the candidates is considered a contribution under Maine law. We strongly oppose allowing publicly funded candidate to accept contributions; it is utterly inconsistent with the intent of the law. And independent expenditures must be completely independent.

Finally, LD 1499 places in statute specific language prohibiting certain expenditures. We believe the statute, which currently calls for the Ethics Commission to issue guidelines on expenditures, is adequate in this regard. We believe the Commission has addressed the issues of both meals and car maintenance in the guidelines. Furthermore, we don't see the value of a blanket ban on spending money on meals. Certainly it is inappropriate for candidates to wine and dine their friends and family on the public dime, but those who attempted to get away with this in the past were rightly fined and forced to return this misspent money. We would prefer that this kind of nitty gritty detail be placed in a more appropriate vehicle than the statute, and in this case it is the Ethics Commission guidelines which may be updated as necessary.

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.