

# Maine Citizens for Clean Elections

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To: Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices

Re: **Seed Money Rule Change**

## **Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) supports the proposed increase in the Seed Money cap for gubernatorial candidates.**

In the aftermath of the 2006 gubernatorial election, much effort was put into tightening up the Clean Election system to ensure that so-called “fringe” candidates are not able to access public funds for their campaigns. This was an important effort which was fully supported by MCCE.

Important as that was, it is also absolutely critical that the Clean Election option appeal to Maine’s strongest, most viable gubernatorial candidates. Having a system that does not attract leading candidates will not allow us to reach the goal of severing the connection between private money and the state’s highest office.

As potential gubernatorial candidates contemplate how to finance their campaigns, it is essential that they see that the Clean Election option provides a realistic opportunity to lay the groundwork for a viable statewide race before public funds are available in the spring of 2010. MCCE believes the cap must be raised in order to meet this test.

Seed money is limited private money that candidates may raise early in their candidacy to get their campaign off the ground and successfully fulfill the requirements of the qualifying process. The contribution limit for seed money is \$100 per donor. Corporations and political action committees are barred from making seed money contributions.

Seed money is the only money available to Clean Election candidates between the time they declare for office and prepare to run a statewide race and the time when public funds are distributed in the spring of 2010. For some candidates, this might be a year-long period.

It is appropriate to revisit the \$50,000 cap which was set more than a decade ago when the Maine Clean Election Act (MCEA) was first drafted. The change is in keeping with the higher costs for everything from gasoline to printing, as well as the significantly higher qualifying threshold that 2010 candidates will be asked to meet. Candidates in 2010 will have to collect a minimum of 3,250 Qualifying Contributions – an increase of 30 percent over 2006.

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*Maine Citizens for Clean Elections is a coalition of groups and individuals that exists to advocate for, increase public support for, defend and improve the Maine Clean Election Act and related campaign finance law. Members include AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, the League of Women Voters of Maine, League of Young Voters, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Council of Churches, Maine People’s Alliance/Maine People’s Resource Center, Maine Women’s Lobby, NAACP-Portland, and Peace Action Maine.*

Doubling the cap to \$100,000 is a big jump, and we don't expect that every candidate will raise the full amount. But we see no harm in raising it that high, and it poses no risk of allowing an influx of big special interest money into Clean Election campaigns.

Here is why:

- ✓ The Seed Money contribution limit remains at \$100.
- ✓ At least 1,000 individual supporters would have to donate in order for a candidate to raise the full amount.
- ✓ Only people – not corporations or political action committees (PACs) – may make Seed Money contributions.
- ✓ Raising the cap does not increase the cost of the program, since the money is given voluntarily by individual donors.
- ✓ Candidates will run campaigns on a level playing field, since any unspent Seed Money is deducted from the initial distribution of public funds.

The statute specifically permits the Commission to revise the seed money amounts by rule in order to “ensure the effective implementation of this chapter.” We believe that raising the Seed Money cap will do just that by enhancing the attractiveness of the Clean Election system to the strongest candidates for governor.

We appreciate the Commission undertaking this rule change and fully support its adoption.