



**TO:** The Honorable Senator Nancy B. Sullivan, Senate Chair  
The Honorable Representative Pamela Jabar Trinward, House Chair  
The Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

**DATE:** February 4, 2009

**RE:** LD 205, "An Act to Repeal the Maine Clean Election Act"

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### **Maine Citizens for Clean Elections opposes LD 205.**

The Maine Clean Election Act exists because Maine people want it. Maine citizens researched the role of money in Maine politics and drafted a law that would improve our campaign finance system.

On Election Day, 1995, a diverse array of 1,100 volunteers stationed themselves at polling places around the state. Fourteen hours later they had more than 65,000 signatures in hand – plenty to qualify the question for the ballot. The question was, "Do you want Maine to adopt new campaign finance laws and give public funding to candidates for state office who agree to spending limits?"

One year later, 56% of voters approved the new law. The victory was statewide, in 15 of 16 counties. Exit polls showed that majorities of women and men, Republicans, Democrats and unenrolled voters supported new campaign finance laws including the public financing of campaigns for state office.

Naysayers challenged the Clean Election Act in federal court, and it was found to be constitutional in both the district and the 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

Critics thought that, for a host of reasons, it would never work. Among the certainties we heard were: no one would use it because it wasn't enough money. It was partisan, and only Democrats would use it. Candidates would not ask voters for five dollars. Candidates foolish enough to use it would be trapped at the end of the campaign because the matching funds system would never work, and they would be drastically outspent.

Nationally, all eyes turned to Maine to see what would happen with this first-in-the-nation full public funding system.

Today we are the envy of states around the country because the Maine Clean Election Act works.

It has been used now in five election cycles, with hundreds of candidates participating in each of those cycles – a total of almost 1,300 Clean Election candidate campaigns in general elections.

#### **Member Organizations**

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, 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, Natural Resources Council of Maine, Peace Action Maine

Eighty-five percent of the 124<sup>th</sup> Legislature successfully used Clean Election funding to win their seats. Eighty-one percent of the 2008 candidates used the system. Candidates in all parties and unenrolled candidates use Clean Elections. Many legislators say that without Clean Elections they would not have run for state office.

Senate candidates	77%	House candidates	82%		
Republicans	71%	Democrats	91%		
Green Independents	78%	Unenrolled	67%		
Women	88%	Men	78%		
Incumbents	80%	Challengers	76%	Open seat candidates	89%

Maine voters in each cycle are asked to help candidates qualify. Tens of thousands of voters have willingly written checks for \$5 in order to support their favored candidates.

Tens of thousands of Maine taxpayers check “YES” on line 1 of their Maine Income tax form, adding several hundred thousand dollars to the Maine Clean Election Fund each year.

Voters polled in a Spring 2008 Critical Insights tracking poll affirmed the strong support for Clean Elections. Eighty-two percent said they think gubernatorial candidates should use Clean Elections. Sixty-one percent said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who participates in the system.

Thanks to the 1996 reforms, there are no large contributions going to candidates for office. Private money plays a much diminished role in elections. Candidates compete on a level playing field. Voters have more choices, with more first-time candidates, more women, and more contested races. Clean Election campaigns are different, with more time for voter contact and a strictly limited budget.

The Maine Clean Election Act is a success thanks to the sound principles on which it is based and because of the careful attention of successive legislatures. In each cycle since 2000, the Legal and Veterans Affairs Committee has sorted through many bills, consulted with staff at the Ethics Commission, listened to citizens and elected leaders, and made the necessary tweaks to make a good system better.

We urge you to continue that tradition by firmly rejecting this repeal effort and turning your attention to the bills that aim to strengthen this valuable program.

**Please honor the will of Maine people by voting “ought not to pass” on LD 205.**

Alison Smith, Co-chair  
207.879.7440