



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: March 9, 2009

RE: LD 259, An Act To Amend the Maine Clean Election Act, Rep. Giles, sponsor

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) testifies neither for nor against LD 259.

This bill contains two relatively minor changes to the Maine Clean Election Act, an increase in the Seed Money Cap for House and Senate candidates and an option for a \$10 Qualifying Contribution.

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 current caps of \$500 for House candidates and \$1,500 for Senate candidates were set in the 1996 law. Although we have not heard complaints from legislative candidates that the caps are too low, it is fair to ask whether, after five election cycles, the caps should be raised. We see little harm in raising the caps to the levels proposed -- \$750 and \$2,000 for House and Senate candidates respectively, but we believe that participants in the system are best positioned to make the case for an increase. 42% of legislative candidates in 2008 raised the maximum amount of seed money allowed under current law.

A Qualifying Contribution is currently defined in part as a check or money order for \$5. This bill would allow the amount to be either 5 or 10 dollars. Today, voters may make Qualifying Contributions, and they may make unlimited voluntary donations to the Maine Clean Election Fund, so those who wish to give more are certainly allowed to do so. However, it is not currently permissible to combine Qualifying Contributions and voluntary donations in a single check or money order. We do not see a strong rationale for this particular change, but if the Committee wants to consider strengthening the channel for voluntary contributions, you might consider simply defining a Qualifying Contribution as a check or money order for \$5 or more.

As you are well aware, numerous other provisions relating to Clean Elections law will be before you in other bills during this session, for example a proposal that would raise Qualifying Contributions outright to \$10. While these individual changes by themselves seem small, it is important to take into account the cumulative effect that these small changes will have on the Clean Election system. So if you are considering supporting LD 259, we ask you to consider it together with related proposals to make sure that the policy that results makes sense in its totality.

Ann Luther
MCCE Co-chair
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Member Organizations

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, EqualityMaine, 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