



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 16, 2009

RE: LD 584, "An Act To Amend the Maine Clean Election Act To Equalize the Qualifying Period for All Candidates and To Increase the Number of Required Contributions for Candidates to the Legislature," Representative Trinward, sponsor

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) testifies in support of LD 584.

This bill contains two provisions that amend the Maine Clean Election Act in ways that MCCE believes will strengthen the Act and we thank Rep. Trinward for bringing it forward.

First, the bill requires that all participating candidates regardless of their party status must qualify for Clean Election funding by the same date: April 15th of the election year.¹

One benefit of this change is that it treats all candidates exactly the same way under the qualifying process, whether they belong to a major party or not. This change would eliminate an argument about fairness that has been made since the first cycle of Clean Elections. Another benefit is that budget writers will have certainty about the maximum number of publicly funded candidates in the general election before the Legislature adjourns. Especially in the gubernatorial race, where each general election candidate receives a substantial sum, it will be helpful to know early how many unenrolled candidates have qualified for public funding.

While some will argue that this change makes it harder for unenrolled candidates to qualify, MCCE believes that qualifying within the same time frame as all other candidates is both fair and beneficial. It ensures that all candidates who qualify have established a significant level of organization six months before Election Day, as well as having demonstrated strong support

¹ The only exceptions are for special elections, when the Ethics Commission determines an appropriate qualifying period.

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

among voters. Unenrolled candidates who qualify benefit from the change because they receive a distribution during the primary period. This ensures that their campaigns do not “go dark” in the primary period even though they are not in a contested primary race. Unenrolled candidates who do not achieve a high threshold of support in this more aggressive timeframe do not receive funding, but those who do can be sure that the timing and amount of funding will make for a viable and competitive campaign.

Second, the bill raises by 30 percent the number of Qualifying Contributions that participating legislative candidates must collect. House candidates would gather a minimum of 65 Qualifying Contributions instead of the 50 that are required today. For Senate candidates, the increase is from 150 to 195. This change is in line with the increase made in gubernatorial Qualifying Contributions in the 123rd Legislature. We believe this change is appropriate because after five cycles of Clean Elections, there is general agreement that qualifying is easier now that voters, candidates, and parties are familiar with the law. We think the increase is high enough to ensure that candidates are demonstrating a high level of support within their districts, yet not so high as to discourage candidates from trying to qualify. It has the additional benefit of increasing the revenue stream from legislative candidates’ Qualifying Contributions by 30 percent.

We strongly urge the Committee to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 584.

Ann Luther, Co-Chair

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