



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 780, "An Act To Increase the Amount and Number of Qualifying Contributions under the Maine Clean Election Act," Representative Flaherty, sponsor

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) testifies neither for nor against LD 780.

LD 780 raises the number of Qualifying Contributions (QCs) for gubernatorial candidates to 5,000. This is a 100% increase over the number that was required in the last gubernatorial election.

The 123rd Legislature considered increases in the number of gubernatorial QCs and settled on a 30% increase, to 3,250. The rationale for this increase was to find a threshold that allows real candidates to receive public financing, but prevents people from gaming the system to use taxpayer money to go shopping. No election has been run with this new provision, and we believe it is premature to raise it again. By all accounts it was very challenging for candidates to raise 2,500 QCs in 2006, and we believe the existing 30% increase will disqualify some contenders. We see no need to raise the number any higher at this time.

The bill also raises the number of QCs that House candidates must raise from 50 to 75, a 50% increase. It does not change the number of QCs for State Senate candidates. The number of QCs for legislative candidates has not been raised since the law went into effect in 2000. MCCE endorses a 30% increase in legislative QCs, which would bring the number of QCs for State Senate candidates from 150 to 195 and for House candidates from 50 to 65. This change is included in LD 584, which we support.

Finally, LD 780 doubles the amount of a Qualifying Contribution from \$5 to \$10. MCCE believes the current amount, \$5, has worked well because it is inclusive. Maine voters, regardless of their own economic means, are able to help candidates they support qualify for public funding. Raising the amount of a Qualifying Contribution to \$10 would make it more difficult for some voters to participate and therefore for some candidates to qualify. While it would also have the beneficial effect of increasing revenue to the Maine Clean Election Fund, we do not endorse this idea as a stand-alone

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

measure. We are very interested to hear what legislators who participated in Clean Elections think the effect would be on voters' ability to participate in the qualifying process, but especially in these difficult economic times, the barrier to receiving public financing ought to remain the total number of donations, not the ability of supporters to pay.

We urge the Committee to consider the provisions in LD 780 in the context of similar bills that have similar goals. The system that results must make sense in its totality.

Ann Luther, Co-Chair
207.664.0696