



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 30, 2009

RE: LD 923, "Resolve, To Reduce Funding to Maine Clean Election Act Candidates,"
Senator McCormick, sponsor

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) opposes LD 923.

MCCE understands that budget concerns will color every decision made by the 124th Legislature, and we appreciate the desire to find savings in all state departments and programs.

Senator McCormick is proposing that the amount distributed to Clean Election candidates in 2010 be 20% less than the amount distributed to candidates in 2008. Since there were no distributions to gubernatorial candidates in 2008, we assume the bill would have no effect on the 2010 gubernatorial race, and we ask that this point be clarified. MCCE believes that 20% is a significant reduction that would make the Clean Election system less attractive to many candidates. It would also result in less communication between candidates and voters.

Since we do not run legislative campaigns ourselves, we must rely on our conversations with candidates, legislators, and other political operatives to understand the adequacy of funding levels. We do hear once in a while from those who say they did not need their whole distribution and were able to return a sizable amount to the Maine Clean Election Fund at the end of their campaign. In all cases, these are incumbent legislators. Far more often, we hear of candidates and others who find that the rising costs of everything from paper and postage to gas make it difficult to budget for the kind of campaign they would like to run. This is especially true for first time candidates and challengers. We also hear many concerns about funding levels from candidates in very large geographic districts who feel they must rely more heavily on paid communications with voters.

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

Our sense is that a significant cut like the one proposed in LD 923 would advantage incumbent legislators, discourage competition, and reduce voter contact and voter choice. These are unacceptable and avoidable policy outcomes.

In 2008, the 123rd Legislature reduced by 5% the distributions to participating general election candidates. The savings across all races were significant enough to help to balance that year's budget and individual candidates were able to get by with minor adjustments to their campaign plans. This was understood to be a one-time reduction. Candidates saw the need for this small sacrifice (\$218 for House and \$1,004 for Senate candidates), and there was little effect overall except for the savings that resulted and the somewhat lower spending numbers that are now part of the calculation for 2010 races under the statutory formula.

The table below shows what the general election distributions would be for contested races in 2010 under LD 923. As you can see, this sets the clock back to somewhere between 2000 and 2002, and we believe would this reduce the viability of the system in many races.

	2008	20% Reduction	2010	2000 / 2002
House (general)	\$4,144	\$829	\$3,315	\$3,253 / \$4,255
Senate (general)	\$19,078	\$3,816	\$15,262	\$12,910 / \$17,528

We do not recommend a reduction in distribution amounts. We support measures to be heard later this session to revise the statutory formula for computing increases in the distribution amount using the CPI or other index in combination with other techniques to prevent anomalous increases based on outsized spending on one or two races. We believe the statutory formula thus revised should be used to calculate new distribution amounts for the 2010 races. If an adjustment is later needed because of a tight budget, care should be taken to make sure that funds are adequate for viable races and that the fundamental good of the program is not undermined.

We urge an "Ought Not to Pass" vote on LD 923.

Thank you.

Alison Smith, Co-Chair 879-7440