



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: April 29, 2009

RE: LD 1420 "An Act To Alter the Distribution of Maine Clean Election Act Funding to Gubernatorial Candidates," Rep. Carey, sponsor

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) opposes LD 1420.

This bill proposes a dramatically different public funding system for gubernatorial candidates than the one passed by voters in 1996. While MCCE is intrigued by some of the ideas that shape this proposal, we have several serious concerns with this legislation.

LD 1420 dramatically lowers the threshold for qualifying for public funds in a gubernatorial race. This concept is at odds with what has been a strong legislative priority for the last two or more years, and that is to raise the qualifying bar high enough that marginal candidates are not able to access public funds.

The proposal in LD 1420 offers an opportunity for candidates who do not begin with a wide following or strong name recognition to build support over the course of the campaign and become competitive, but it does so at the expense of the level playing field. The proposal is consistent with recent reform trends toward so-called hybrid models of campaign finance – a hybrid of public and small-donor private fundraising – but it is a much different model from the full public funding system that we have here in Maine.

Under this proposal candidates would not be able to shut down their fundraising machinery after receiving public funds and would have much more reporting to do since they would continue to raise \$5 contributions. Since these contributions would be matched with \$55 of public funds, there would need to be a significant accountability mechanism to ensure that donors were verified Maine voters, and that these donors did not make multiple additional contributions. These seem like fairly substantial drawbacks.

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

There are many elements of this proposal that remain to be engineered – the matching fund system, for example. And the proposal overall is so different from any baseline of actual experience, here in Maine or anywhere else, for that matter, that it is difficult to know whether the cost of our program would go up or down. With the budget uncertainties now facing us, it would seem that predictability would be at a premium.

We appreciate the sponsor’s motivation to put forward this thought-provoking proposal, and we look forward to working together on improvements to the current gubernatorial Clean Election system.

Alison Smith, Co-chair
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