



TO: The Honorable Senator Nichi Farnham, Senate Chair  
The Honorable Representative Michael Beaulieu, House Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: March 28, 2011

RE: LD 659 An Act to Repeal the Maine Clean Election Laws  
*Sponsored by Representative Aaron Libby*

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### **Maine Citizens for Clean Elections opposes LD 659.**

Last year Maine celebrated the first ten years of Clean Elections, a law that exists because Maine people want it. Back in the 1980's and 1990's Maine citizens researched the role of money in Maine politics and drafted a law that would improve our campaign finance system.

On Election Day, 1995, a diverse array of 1,100 volunteers stationed themselves at polling places around the state. Fourteen hours later they had more than 65,000 signatures in hand – plenty to qualify the question for the ballot. The question was, “Do you want Maine to adopt new campaign finance laws and give public funding to candidates for state office who agree to spending limits?”

One year later, 56% of voters approved the new law. The victory was statewide, in 15 of 16 counties. Exit polls showed that majorities of women and men, Republicans, Democrats and unenrolled voters supported new campaign finance laws including the public financing of campaigns for state office.

Naysayers challenged the Clean Election Act in federal court, and it was found to be constitutional in both the District and the 1<sup>st</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

Critics thought that, for a host of reasons, it would never work. Among the certainties we heard were: No one would use it because it wasn't enough money. It was partisan, and only Democrats would use it. Candidates would not ask voters for five dollars. Candidates foolish enough to use it would be trapped at the end of the campaign because the matching funds system would never work, and they would be drastically outspent.

Nationally, all eyes turned to Maine to see what would happen with this first-in-the-nation full public funding system.

Much to many peoples' surprise, it worked! It has been used now in six election cycles, with several hundred candidates participating in each of those cycles – a total of around 1,600 Clean Election candidate campaigns in general elections. Scores, maybe hundreds, of candidates and legislators

#### **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 State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1989, Maine Women's Lobby, NAACP-Portland, Sierra Club Maine Chapter

have never run any other way. It works because Maine people keep coming forward to participate in it.

Eighty percent of the 125<sup>th</sup> Legislature successfully used Clean Election funding to win their seats. Every one of the senators who won their seats for the first time last year used Clean Elections. Candidates in all parties and unenrolled candidates use Clean Elections. Many legislators say that without Clean Elections they would not have run for state office.

Maine voters, in each cycle, are asked to help candidates qualify. Tens of thousands of voters have willingly written checks for \$5 in order to support their favored candidates. The law has kept up with the times, and now many Qualifying Contributions are made online.

Tens of thousands of Maine taxpayers check "YES" on line 1 of their Maine Income tax form, adding several hundred thousand dollars to the Maine Clean Election Fund each year.

Thanks to the 1996 reforms, there are no large contributions going to candidates for state office. Private money plays a diminished role in elections. Candidates compete on a level playing field. Voters have more choices, with more first-time candidates, more women, and more contested races. Clean Election campaigns are different, with more time for voter contact and a strictly limited budget. Legislators have a more straightforward relationship with lobbyists than did their predecessors.

Ten years after it went into effect, we are the envy of states around the country because the Maine Clean Election Act works. Opponents have not given up, and we continue to face challenges in the courts and in the legislature. But with each challenge, Maine people come forward to defend their law.

The Maine Clean Election Act is a success thanks to the sound principles on which it is based, the continued enthusiasm of Maine people, and the careful attention of successive legislatures. In each cycle since 2000, this Committee has sorted through many bills, consulted with staff at the Ethics Commission, the Attorney General's office and with the committee analyst, listened to citizens and elected leaders, and made the necessary small adjustments to make a good system better.

We urge you to continue that tradition by firmly rejecting this repeal effort and turning your attention to the bills that aim to strengthen Clean Elections and move forward the goals of reform.

**Please honor the will of Maine people by voting "ought not to pass" on LD 659.**

Thank you,

Alison Smith, Co-president

## **Support for Clean Elections in the Maine Press**

### **News coverage in the Free Press**

*Dirty Money, Big Corn, Fat Kids 11/24/2010*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/Who%20bought%20your%20politician%20Free%20Press%2011-24-2010.pdf>

### **Libby takes aim at clean elections funding**

*Journal Tribune, February 25, 2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/Journal%20Tribune%202%205%202011%20LD%20659.pdf>

### **Supporting Clean Election fund keeps politics fair**

*Journal Tribune Editorial 3/18/2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/Supporting%20Clean%20Election%20fund%20keeps%20politics%20fair%20JT%20editorial%203-18-2011.pdf>

### **Clean Elections Funds work, leave program alone**

*Charlie Bernstein op-ed in the Kennebec Journal, 3/6/2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/Leave%20program%20alone%20Bernstein%20KJ%203-6-2011.pdf>

### **Clean election check-off**

*Bangor Daily News editorial 2/28/2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/BDN%20editorial%20-%20Clean%20election%20check%202-28-2011.pdf>

### **Our View: Governor's races should stay in Clean Elections**

*Portland Press Herald editorial 2/18/2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/PPH%20Governors%20races%20should%20stay%20in%20Clean%20Elections%20editorial%202-18-2011.pdf>

### **A look back at the week's news**

*Sun Journal editorial 2/12/2011*

<http://www.mainelections.org/assets/files/inthenews/Sun%20Journal%20Check%20YES%20editorial%202-12-2011.pdf>