



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

DATE: April 29, 2011

RE: LD 856 An Act To Change the Campaign Contribution Limits  
*Sponsored by Senator Seth Goodall*

---

**Maine Citizens for Clean Elections offers testimony in opposition to LD 856.**

MCCE believes that strong campaign finance laws work to reduce the influence of big money in government, eliminate corruption and the appearance of corruption, increase public access to information, and allow candidates to compete more equitably for public office. We hold that well-crafted contribution limits are consistent with those goals.

We support contribution limits when they are set low enough to reduce the influence of wealthy donors but high enough to allow candidates to amass the resources they need to run competitive campaigns. Contribution limits do not need to be set so high that candidates can be assured of raising more money than any imaginable, self-financed opponent. Evidence from other jurisdictions shows that, while successful candidates need enough money to be competitive, they do not need more money than any of their opponents in order to win.

LD 856 would raise contribution limits for county and municipal elections from \$350 to \$750. This is a substantial increase, especially considering that the 124<sup>th</sup> Legislature just raised the limit from \$250 to \$350 for the last election. This new, higher limit is also indexed to inflation.

A cursory examination of contributions in 2010 elections for County Commissioner and District Attorney reveals that candidates in just a handful of races raised any significant amount of money at

**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

---

all. In those races where money was a factor, very few individual donors bumped up against the existing \$350 limit, and the majority of those maxed-out contributions were from party committees.

While fundraising from individual donors was limited even in the most competitive races, several candidates contributed personally and significantly to their own campaigns. This suggests either unwillingness by candidates to engage in vigorous fundraising for election to these offices or unwillingness by donors to provide financial support to candidates in these races.

If the result is that only those candidates with the personal financial resources to self-fund their campaigns can afford to run competitive races, then that would indeed be troubling. But there is no indication from contribution patterns in 2010 that raising the contribution limit would solve the problem since very few donors gave the maximum under the current limit.

A better approach would be to offer publicly funded elections for County Commissioner, District Attorney, and Sheriff, but perhaps that is too big a proposition for today. For now, MCCE recommends leaving the newly raised contribution limit of \$350 in place for at least one more cycle.