



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: L.D. 1262 An Act To Increase Penalties for Certain Violations of the Campaign Reports and
Financing Laws *Sponsored by Senator Larry Bliss*

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections offers testimony in support of LD 1262.

Last year's state elections saw an unprecedented level of independent spending in Maine's legislative races, and in the post-*Citizens United* political environment, we are sure to see more of this in the future, not less.

Wisely, Maine law does not attempt to limit independent spending. To do so would violate the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Maine law does contain reporting requirements and transparency measures so that it is possible for voters to know who is speaking to them in an election.

We need accountability and enforcement tools that are an appropriate match for the extremely well-funded players who increasingly make independent expenditures in Maine candidate races. Our campaign finance laws must provide for penalties that are an effective deterrent to breaking the law. If potential penalties are not high enough, we run the risk that that violating our laws will be considered a winning tactical alternative with a low "cost of doing business."

The stakes are high. Independent spending in candidate races can and does influence the outcome of elections – people wouldn't do it if that wasn't so. The consequences of poor compliance with disclosure laws can be consequential and far-reaching. If one side gains an advantage by breaking the law, Maine people are the losers.

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

We need to give the Ethics Commission the tools they need for robust and effective enforcement of our laws. Some would argue that the increased penalties proposed by LD 1262 are not high enough, and we might agree. But this is certainly a step in the right direction. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1262.

Ann Luther, Co-president

Trenton