



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini
The Honorable John Schneck, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: January 8, 2020

RE: LD 1868, An Act To Improve the Reporting of Grassroots Lobbying

Good afternoon Senator Luchini and Representative Schneck. My name is Robert Howe. I'm a resident of Brunswick. I am speaking today on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections in favor of LD 1868, An Act To Improve the Reporting of Grassroots Lobbying.

Grassroots lobbying, also known as indirect lobbying, is lobbying with the intention of reaching the legislature and making a difference in the decision-making process. Grassroots lobbying is an approach that separates itself from direct lobbying through the act of asking the *general public* (or a specific subset of the public) to contact legislators and government officials concerning the issue at hand, as opposed to conveying the message to the legislators directly. The unique characteristic of grassroots lobbying, in contrast to other forms of lobbying, is that it involves stimulating the politics of specific communities. Companies, associations and citizens are increasingly partaking in grassroots lobbying as an attempt to influence a change in legislation.¹

Grassroots lobbying can help to inform the public about important issues and, therefore, can serve a useful purpose. But it has become a highly sophisticated means of affecting public policy and warrants disclosure as much as does direct lobbying such as what I am doing right now.

LD 1868 significantly increases the ability of citizens to understand who is paying to try to influence the votes of legislators by influencing the citizens.

First, it drops the financial reporting threshold from \$15,000 to \$2,000 during a month.

Second, it revises the definition of "original source" of contributions so that it is not limited

¹ Graziano, Luigi (2001). *Lobbying, Pluralism and Democracy*. palgrave. p. 57. ISBN 0-333-92056-2.

only to persons who contribute money to the employer of a registered lobbyist.

Third, it brings the law into the digital age by adding to the definition of grassroots lobbying “e-mail, a website or other digital form, telephone or any method of communication similar to the enumerated methods.”

It is worth noting that neither the current law nor this bill would govern communications to members of the public, now matter how much money is being spent, if the purpose is not to encourage the public to contact a “covered official” (an official in the executive branch, an official in the legislative branch, a constitutional officer, the Governor and the Governor's cabinet and staff) but which is nevertheless intended to influence public policy. A current example would be the sizeable effort now underway to stop the transmission corridor proposal by Central Maine Power Company. It perhaps warrants later discussion whether such efforts should also be included within the scope of grassroots lobbying.

We urge your support for the bill.