



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman
The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: Wednesday, April 26, 2023

RE: LD 1698, "An Act to Eliminate Private Contributions to the Maine Clean Election Fund"

Good morning Senator Hickman and Representative Supica.

My name is Anna Kellar. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. I am testifying in opposition to LD1698.

For over 25 years MCCE has advocated for Maine's Clean Election Act public funding system. We were there at the start to advocate for its enactment in 1996, during the early years when participation was ramping up, when budget challenges and court decisions threatened to weaken the program, and up to today where it is well-established and continues to enjoy broad support among the candidates and the general public.

LD 1698 is completely without merit. It solves no identifiable problem, and it would seriously undermine the purpose and operation of Clean Elections. This bill eliminates all streams of revenue to the Maine Clean Election Fund (MCEF) except for the General Fund distributions called for in the Maine Clean Election Act. Between this bill and LD 1466, Clean Elections would be completely defunded.

The seed money provision in the MCEA allows candidates to raise very limited private contributions to get their campaigns off the ground. LD 1698 would disallow ALL contributions to prospective Clean Election candidates, leaving only the option of self-funding in the early days.

The other revenue streams are voluntary donations that go directly to the MCEF. They are not contributions to any candidate. All are important vehicles for Maine people to express their support for the Clean Election system.

Qualifying contributions are made by voters in support of candidates they favor who are running to represent them in the House, Senate, or as Governor. Only candidates who demonstrate this grassroots support may receive Clean Election funding. This qualifying process is essential to ensure that public funds only go to well-supported candidates.

Maine people created the first-in-the-nation Clean Election system, and it has proven itself to be popular with voters and candidates alike in the decades it has been in use. LD 1698 disrespects the hundreds of thousands of Mainers who voted in 1996 and/or in 2015 to pass and then strengthen the law. It disrespects the hundreds of thousands who have checked "yes" on their tax forms. It disrespects the hundreds of thousands who make qualifying contributions.

Maine people have repeatedly spoken loud and clear in support of our citizen-initiated Clean Elections program. It's a voluntary system, so we don't expect 100% of candidates to use it or even to like it. But we do expect ALL legislators to respect the will of Maine people.

Please vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1698.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.