



TO: The Honorable Senator Peggy Rotundo  
The Honorable Representative Melanie Sachs, Co-Chairs  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

The Honorable Senator Craig Hickman Co-Chair  
The Honorable Laura Supica Co-Chair  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 23, 2024

RE: LD 2214 Supplemental Budget Bill – Maine Clean Elections Fund

---

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Hickman, and Representative Supica.

My name is Anna Kellar. I am here today as the Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. I am testifying concerning the portion of LD 2214 concerning the budget for the Maine Clean Elections Fund.

The budget passed last summer included the statutory funding of \$6 million for the two-year cycle for Clean Elections. We have been glad to see that over the last three budgets, this voter-approved funding has been routinely appropriated and that the hold-ups and raids on the fund to cover other priorities have become a thing of the past.

However, due to the more than \$6 million that was raided from the fund in the past and never returned, as well as the increasing costs of the legislative program, we have some concerns about the ability of the fund to cover costs in the next few election cycles.

Earlier this year, Director Wayne of the Ethics Commission submitted a report on the status of the Clean Elections Fund noting that action will need to be taken before the 2026 cycle, to ensure that there is sufficient funding for the anticipated gubernatorial and legislative candidates.

There are a few options you could take to cover this need. The funds designated for FY2027 could be moved forward to FY2026, a revenue-neutral approach that has been taken in the past (for example, ahead of the 2016 election). This would cover the most likely immediate needs, and while this action could be taken next year, we recommend you adjust with this supplemental budget to avoid any doubt in the minds of potential candidates considering whether the Clean Elections fund will be sufficient for their needs.

This revenue-neutral adjustment would provide confidence in the short term. However, it would essentially borrow from future election cycles to pay for past raids to the fund and does not address the long-term needs.

Another option could be to make a one-time appropriation to return some of the money taken from the Clean Elections Fund in previous years. However, we recommend that the best pathway to ensure Clean Elections is sustainable would be to increase the statutory funding to \$3.5 million a year, or \$7 million in a two-year budget. This would cover the increasing cost of the legislative program, as well as the addition of District Attorney candidates to the program, as contemplated in LD 1966, which just passed both chambers with bipartisan votes.

Clean Elections continues to be popular among both legislators and the public and is a model of voter-owned elections that reformers around the country look to for inspiration. To work, Clean Elections funding must be predictable and stable well in advance of major elections. The funding cycle for candidate elections is a four-year cycle, and the fund must be able to accumulate funds in non-gubernatorial years so that adequate funding exists for gubernatorial elections.

To summarize we encourage you to take action this year to, 1. move forward the 2027 Clean Elections appropriation into 2026, and 2. to increase the statutory funding by \$500,000 a year. Together, these approaches ensure a robust Clean Elections program will be viable well into the future.

The Clean Election system brings great benefits to Maine at a very modest cost. Citizen ownership of our democracy is a good value and well worth the price.

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