



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

DATE: February 3, 2025

RE: LD 207: An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Qualifying Contributions of Cash Under the Maine Clean Election Act

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

My name is Al Cleveland. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Advocacy Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. We are testifying neither for nor against LD 207.

For 30 years, MCCE has advocated for Maine's Clean Election Act (MCEA) 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 when it is well-established and enjoys broad support among the candidates, voters, and the general public.

We appreciate Senator Bennett for bringing this bill forward and beginning the conversation about challenges that candidates face in receiving qualifying contributions. However, it is our understanding that the current process has proved key in identifying potential, and actual, fraud. We are loath to endorse any change that could undermine the integrity of the Clean Election system or take important tools away from the Ethics Commission in their enforcement efforts. The accountability and enforcement mechanisms embedded in the law and rules are critical to the success of Clean Elections and to the ongoing confidence of voters in the program.

The addition of the online qualifying contribution system has made participating in the qualifying process convenient and efficient for the many candidates and voters who use it. Of course, as Senator Bennett rightly points out, it may not work for everyone. Is there a demographic group for whom the current process is a disadvantage? It is certainly worth asking whether it is possible to streamline the process for voters who wish to provide a qualifying contribution in cash in a way that does not forfeit the benefits of today's 2-form process.

MCCE has been unable to ascertain the answers to some of these key questions in time for today's hearing. Does one political party receive more cash contributions than the other? How many cases of

fraud have been detected with the second cash contribution form? Would it be possible to detect fraud and ensure integrity with a streamlined or redesigned form? These are some questions the Committee may wish to ask for in the work session.

MCCE is deeply committed to the twin goals of a robust public funding option and public accountability for the resources dedicated to Clean Elections. We are open to considering pragmatic adjustments to the system – whether in statute, rules, or simply with redesigned forms – as new concerns and opportunities for improvement come to light.

We thank Senator Bennett for bringing forward his concerns and the committee for its careful consideration of the bill. We know the Ethics Commission staff will have information and analysis to inform the process. We look forward to working with all to keep Clean Elections strong and effective.