



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

DATE: April 7, 2021

RE: LD 921, An Act to Eliminate Maine Clean Election Act Funding for Candidates in
Gubernatorial Races

Good morning Senator Luchini and Representative Caiazzo.

My name is Robert Howe. I'm a resident of Brunswick. I am here today as the lobbyist for Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. I am testifying in opposition to LD 921.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections has been the leading campaign finance organization in Maine for more than twenty years and one of the nation's most respected state-based organizations advocating for democratically funded elections. We are proud of our national reputation. But we are all Mainers, and our nonpartisan mission has always been with and for the people of this state.

MCCE is strongly opposed to LD 921 for the following reasons.

First, this bill would substitute the legislature's judgment for the clearly expressed will of the voters. The gubernatorial funding system is a fundamental part of the citizen-initiated Clean Election program approved by voters in 1996 and again in 2015. The people have spoken loudly, clearly, and repeatedly, and we urge you to respect their decision.

Second, we know from thousands of conversations with Maine voters that they want a strong Clean Elections law as one response to a political system that seems increasingly out of touch. From our public opinion polling, we also know that Mainers specifically support the Clean Election option for gubernatorial candidates. But, it's not just polls. In 2018 alone, 18,000 Maine voters offered concrete support in the form of Qualifying Contributions to participating gubernatorial candidates -- each one an endorsement of the idea that we want a viable alternative to the big-money campaigns with which we are all too familiar.

Third, the purposes served by the public funding option are extremely important in gubernatorial elections, certainly no less than in legislative races. The governor, after all, is the most powerful elected official in Maine government. Gubernatorial elections are expensive to run, making it much more difficult for a candidate of modest means to wage a successful campaign using only private funding. Not

every otherwise qualified candidate relishes the idea of high-dollar fundraising and for some, the need to do that is a deal-breaker. Clean Elections offers candidates a choice: go for private funding and ask people for up to \$3,200 each while spending as much of your own money as you like, or use Clean Elections with its limits on spending and ask Maine voters for Qualifying Contributions of \$5. In each cycle in which Clean Elections was an option, several gubernatorial candidates have opted in.

Fourth, it is very difficult to qualify for gubernatorial public funding. To qualify for just the base amount, 2018 gubernatorial candidates had to collect 3,200 Qualifying Contributions. In each cycle, more candidates attempt to use Clean Elections than are able to complete the process. In 2018, there were just three who made it over the threshold -- one Democrat, one Republican, and one independent. Seven others attempted to qualify, but did not make it. Since Clean Elections was first used in a gubernatorial election in 2002, five Republicans, three Democrats, two Green Independents, and two unenrolled candidates have qualified.

Concerns about the corrosive influence of money in politics fuels much worry about the health of our democracy. Across the country, and across the political spectrum, people want to move forward, and end the days of billionaires buying elections. People are looking for a better way, and we have that better way right here in Maine. The success of our Clean Election system is an inspiration to all who seek to align our campaign finance laws with small "d" democratic values and allow candidates the freedom to run for high offices without deep ties to big money.

Here in Maine, voters stand up for Clean Elections whenever the program is threatened. We are asking you to stand up for Clean Elections today. Whether or not you choose it, each of you has the opportunity to use Clean Elections. Please do not vote to deny this same opportunity to those running for governor.

I urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 921.

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