



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Louis J. Luchini
The Honorable Representative John C. Schneck, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: January 30, 2019

RE: LD 54 An Act to Limit the Influence of Lobbyists by Expanding the Prohibition on
Accepting Political Contributions

My name is Ann Luther. I'm a resident of Trenton. I am here today as a volunteer representing members of the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League supports LD 54.

The League of Women Voters believes that one of the goals of campaign finance law should be to combat undue influence in government. And so we applaud the fact that, for years, Maine law has prohibited registered lobbyists and their clients from making campaign contributions to elected officials while the legislature is in session. The existence of the so-called "session ban" is an acknowledgement that it is inappropriate and troubling for lawmakers to solicit or receive money from powerful special interests while they are in the very process of debating and enacting policy in the public interest.

Yet the ban is constructed so narrowly that its spirit is in danger of getting lost. Almost up to the moment a session opens, and minutes after the gavel goes down, lobbyists and members are meeting and greeting over open checkbooks. This practice undermines public confidence in government. The ban should be extended.

LD 54 doesn't hinder lobbyists from influencing government, nor should it. Good policy can't be made without the input of interested parties. In our increasingly complex world, where the making of public policy demands so much technical expertise, professional lobbyists for both private and public interests play a critical role.

However, unlike most citizens, most registered lobbyists are in the business of influencing members of the legislature and other government officials. They are paid to influence government decisions, and the contributions they give and raise for elected officials play a key role in pursuing their lobbying interests and advancing their own professional careers.

We have testified previously about "representational inequality." That's the notion that, although we each get one vote, we are not all represented with the same vigor. Affluent donors get what they

want. The rest of us get what we want only when we happen to want the same thing that donors want. Lobbyists are paid to make this connection between wealthy donors and the policy outcomes they favor. Lobbyists buy access and influence with their political contributions, and these contributions are the cost of doing business for them and their firms.

The League values the principle of equity in representation. That's the notion that every voter's voice gets equal consideration and representation in government. We are far from achieving that goal while affluent donors' voices are the first and loudest to be heard.

In 2018, the Pew Research Center conducted a survey on public confidence in leaders and institutions. Of all groups, including the military, scientists, religious leaders, the press, and business leaders, the survey found that elected officials were the least trusted to act in the best interest of the public. Here in Maine, the League believes that enacting LD 54 is a critical step in restoring public confidence in our government. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'd be happy to answer any questions.