



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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

DATE: January 27, 2014

RE: LD 1631 An Act To Clarify What Constitutes a Contribution to a Candidate
LD 1613 An Act To Define "Agent" and "Candidate's Political Committee" in the
Laws Regarding Limitations on Campaign Contributions and Expenditures

Good morning. My name is Polly Ward. I'm a resident of South Freeport. I work as a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve on its Advocacy Committee. The League of Women Voters of Maine submits the following testimony in support of LD 1631 and LD 1613.

The League's position on Campaign Finance reflects our continuing concern for open and honest elections and for maximum citizen participation in the political process. The League's position is that the methods of financing political campaigns should ensure the public's right to know, combat corruption and undue influence, enable candidates to compete more equitably for public office, and allow maximum participation in the political process.

Recent decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court have opened up our elections to a vast influx of unlimited expenditures from millionaires, corporations, unions, and trade associations. These independent expenditures threaten to overwhelm citizens' voices, lead to corruption, and unfairly disrupt the representative process.

But it could be worse. The vast new money flowing through our elections from PACs and Super PACs in the form of so-called "independent expenditures" is allowed by the Court so long as it is not coordinated with the candidate or the candidate's campaign. We must be vigilant to protect against weakening the prohibitions on coordination. If these "independent expenditures" were to be directed by the candidate or key decision-makers for the candidate, they would have the same corrupting effect as allowing unlimited contributions directly to candidates.

In February, 2012, the League of Women Voters issued the following statement to President Obama:

"The Obama campaign's decision this week to allow surrogates to assist Super PACs in raising funds illustrates how broken the system is and that the FEC is

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asleep at the switch. The only reason that the leading presidential campaigns of both political parties are able to work with the Super PACs is that the FEC is not enforcing the law. ... Our democracy needs a fully-functioning FEC."

Don't let this kind of fuzzy enforcement come to Maine. We are very fortunate here in Maine to have a functioning Ethics Commission, and we have reasonable contribution limits. But we need also to have clear, enforceable, and unambiguous laws to prevent coordination so as not to undermine those contribution limits.

Where our laws are ambiguous or subject to interpretation, they open up vast loopholes for unlimited money to hold our candidates hostage to the interests of a few well-funded donors. We need to use common sense to nip any emerging loophole in the bud, and that is the aim of these bills.

We urge you to support LD 1631 or LD 1613 or some combination of the two.