



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

PO Box 863
Augusta, ME 04332-0863

(207) 622-0256
lwvme@gwi.net

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

DATE: February 27, 2017

RE: LD 413 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 for the League of Women Voters of Maine, where I chair the Advocacy Committee. I'm here today on behalf of the League and its members to support LD 413.

I want to read you something. At the founding of the Republic and well into the 19th century, the idea that someone could be paid to petition the government on behalf of someone else, in the service of ideas or interests that he did not personally espouse—always “he” in those days—this was viewed as the height of corruption. The Supreme Court of 1874, ruling in *Trist v. Child*, refused to enforce a lobbying contract and wrote as follows:

If any of the great corporations of the country were to hire adventurers who make market of themselves in this way, to procure the passage of a general law with a view to the promotion of their private interests, the moral sense of every right-minded man would instinctively denounce the employer and employed as steeped in corruption and the employment as infamous...If the instances were numerous, open, and tolerated, they would be regarded as measuring the decay of the public morals and the degeneracy of the times. No prophetic spirit would be needed to foretell the consequences near at hand.

We've come a long way. As I stand before you today, some of my most trusted colleagues and closest allies are registered lobbyists. Today, in an increasingly complex world, where the making of public policy demands so much technical expertise, lobbyists for both private and public interests play a critical role in delivering information to policy makers.

However, the League of Women Voters believes that one of the goals of campaign finance law should be to combat corruption, the appearance of corruption, and undue influence in government. The League believes that it is a symptom of corruption when the political process consistently favors the interests of significant campaign contributors. The League supports measures to place restrictions on direct donations and bundling by lobbyists, which may include monetary limits as well as other regulations.

Founded in 1920, the League of The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major political policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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 success, as well as those of their clients.

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.¹ 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 evolving and ever-more overt practice of buying and selling lobbyist access to elected officials through direct campaign contributions, PAC donations, legislator-hosted fundraising events, and most recently, legislative committee chair events targeted at those lobbyists with business before the legislative committees that they lead, these harken back to the SCOTUS sentiment of 150 years ago—the instances being ever more numerous, open, and tolerated, they measure the systematic corruption of our policy-making process.

LD 413 would go a long way toward curbing these practices and restoring public confidence in our government. We urge you vote Ought To Pass on LD 413.

¹ [Martin Gilens](http://www.russellsage.org/research/inequality-and-democratic-responsiveness), Professor of Politics at Princeton University, “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness,” Russell Sage Foundation, <http://www.russellsage.org/research/inequality-and-democratic-responsiveness> [March 17 2013]