



PRESS RELEASE

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Official Report on the First Run of Portland's Clean Elections Program

[PORTLAND, ME] — Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) has issued a [report](#) that investigates the impact of the first year of Clean Elections in Portland and offers recommendations for improvements.

Portland ran the first Clean Elections program during the November 2023 election cycle. There was strong candidate participation, with seven out of 13 candidates in contested races opting into the program. This 54% participation rate is significantly higher than the 30% candidate participation when the state program first rolled out in 2000.

MCCE [interviewed](#) 12 of the 13 candidates for mayor, city council, and school board who ran in contested races. Most of the candidates were satisfied with the program, while noting areas for improvement, and said that they would use Clean Elections again in the future.

Spending was down, when compared to other similar election years. For example, in 2019, a record \$330,239 was spent on the mayor's race, with two candidates spending well over \$100,000 each. In 2023, a total of \$200,321 was spent, and the largest campaign spent \$78,498.

More voters were also engaged thanks to the program, with 1,260 five dollar qualifying contributions collected by the seven Clean Elections candidates. While individuals may have given to more than one candidate, this is still a remarkable comparison to the approximately 251 individuals who gave to the privately financed candidates.

This first cycle of the program has highlighted several key areas for improvement, including Charter requirements that have not yet been implemented. One of the improvements that is already in development with the City of Portland is to collect five dollar contributions via an

online system. Improvements like these will streamline the process, lessen paperwork, and provide more accessible ways to support the candidates.

“We are pleased to see that several of these changes are already underway,” wrote Anna Kellar, Executive Director of MCCE. “We encourage the Council, Clerk, and community partners to make these additional improvements as soon as possible before the 2024 election.”

Other [recommendations](#) made by MCCE to City Council and Portland’s municipal clerk include allocating a stable budget to the program so that the fund remains healthy and sustainable, build an online searchable database to establish data transparency among the candidates, and create informational flyers – in multiple languages – to inform voters and help build trust in the program.

[Click here to read the report.](#)

Clean Elections is a voluntary campaign funding system for candidates for local office. People running for public office in Portland have the option to have their campaign financed by money from the city, as opposed to relying on private donations or using their own money.

The program gives the voters of Portland more opportunities to vote for candidates who aren’t influenced by big donors. To qualify for public funds, Clean Elections candidates collect five dollar contributions from Portland voters by cash, check, or money order. If they get enough of those contributions to demonstrate that they are a serious candidate with public support, they can turn the contributions in to the city in exchange for a larger sum of money to spend on their campaign.

Fair Elections Portland and Maine Citizens for Clean Elections began the campaign to establish a Clean Elections system in Portland in 2019. The charter revision was approved by voters in 2022. In 2023, the first candidates were able to use Portland’s Clean Elections program. [A full timeline is available here.](#)

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[Maine Citizens for Clean Elections](#) (MCCE) is a nonpartisan nonprofit organization working to ensure that Maine’s campaign finance laws, elections, and government serve the public interest, both in principle and in practice. We engage Maine people from across the political spectrum, using research, education, and outreach to further fairness, inclusion, and opportunity in our politics.