



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 585 – An Act to Allow Cash Qualifying Contributions under the Maine Clean Election Act

March 8, 2017

Senator Mason, Representative Luchini, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 585 – An Act to Allow Cash Qualifying Contributions under the Maine Clean Election Act

My name is Bob Howe, and I am here today to testify for Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. My testimony is neither for nor against LD 585.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections has been the leading organization advocating for strong campaign finance laws in Maine for over 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 mission has always been with and for the people of this state.

We appreciate Senator Miramant for bringing forward this bill. We understand that his motivation is to reduce unnecessary burdens in the process of qualifying for funding.

Since the creation of the new supplemental funding system, the Clean Election law relies more than ever on candidates showing their support by collecting qualifying contributions from voters in their district. The public needs assurance that the qualifying contributions – and the process for counting and approving them – have integrity so that we can be confident that only qualified candidates receive public funding.

Over the years, candidates have submitted an increasing number of qualifying contributions through the Ethics Commission's on-line feature. We think this works very well, establishing accountability and transparency, and reducing some of the administrative burden for both candidates and the Commission.

But the on-line system is not always available on the campaign trail. Candidates collect qualifying contributions in numerous situations, where access to the internet is not convenient or even possible. Therefore, a significant number of qualifying contributions must be paid for with other means. But the law does not allow cash payments. Contributors who do not have a check can utilize a money order provided by the candidate.

This process has a lot of safeguards. When a money order is used, the signature of the contributor is required twice – once on the money order, and a second time on the receipt and acknowledgement form. In addition, the circulator must sign the form. Both the contributor and

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the circulator are notified in prominent text that “Falsifying any information on this form is punishable by law.” Finally, the candidate must personally sign the request for certification which must be submitted with the qualifying contributions. This process provides assurance of the integrity of the qualifying contributions.

MCCE is deeply committed to the twin goals of a robust public funding option, and public accountability for the scarce resources dedicated to Clean Elections. We are open to considering adjustments in the program as new concerns or opportunities for improvement come to light.

We look forward to working Senator Miramant and the Committee on this bill, and to any ideas for how the burden on candidates can be lessened without sacrificing the accountability that is so vital to the public’s trust in Clean Elections.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide additional information for the work session.