

Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 1368 – An Act to Amend Funding Distributions under the Maine Clean Election Act

April 21, 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 1368 – An Act to Amend Funding Distributions under the Maine Clean Election Act.

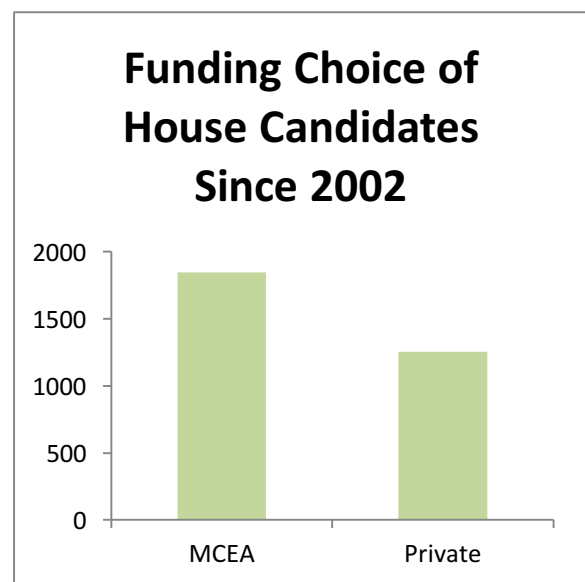
My name is Bob Howe of Howe Cahill. I am here today on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections has been the leading campaign finance organization 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.

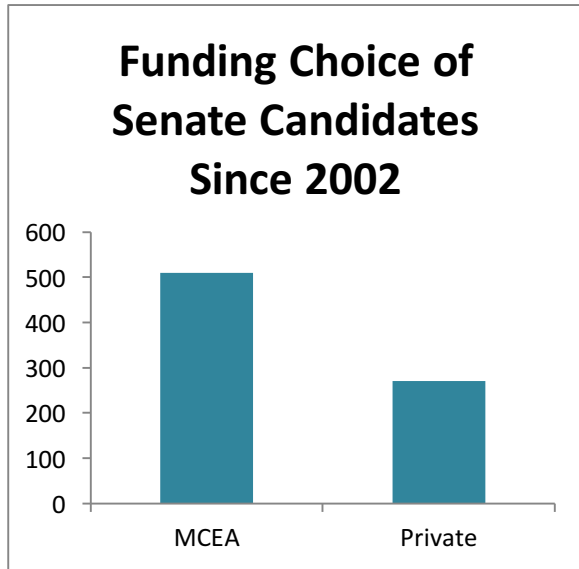
In November 2015 Maine voters, by a margin of ten percentage points, approved a new supplemental funding system for Clean Elections, along with several other improvements in the law. By all accounts, in the 2016 election cycle the new supplemental funding system worked extremely well, helping many candidates remain competitive without requiring excessive levels of funding from the Clean Election Fund.

Even though the voters just delivered a decisive mandate in favor of Clean Elections, LD 1368 proposes to ignore the voters and reverse the changes they approved. **MCCE strongly opposes LD 1368 and urges a unanimous ought not to pass vote.**

This bill requires us to once again walk through the history of Clean Election funding. From 2000 through 2010 qualified candidates were eligible for “matching funds” – a specific source of supplemental funding designed to match the money spent against them in their campaign. This allowed for flexibility in funding – candidates could have enough money to remain competitive, without giving all candidates so much money that



the program would break the bank. Matching funds worked quite well, but in 2011 a court struck this part of the program down.



In 2012 and 2014, candidates who qualified for Clean Elections did not receive any supplemental funds. To no one’s surprise, during those years there was a decline in the number of participating candidates.

Immediately after the court decision, committed citizens, the Maine Ethics Commission, lawmakers and operatives from of various political affiliations, and MCCE reached strong consensus on a replacement for matching funds. This is how the current system of supplemental funds – based on the candidates’ ability to show public support by collecting additional qualifying contributions – was created. In the 126th

legislature, LD1309 was passed through both chambers with bipartisan support to fulfill this thoughtful conclusion of diverse stakeholders. It unfortunately was never funded by the Appropriations Committee and subsequently died. It is at this point that MCCE began the process of advancing virtually identical legislation through the citizens’ initiative process.

LD 1368 would undo all the effort that went into developing the supplemental funding option. It would repeal the citizen initiative endorsed by 55% of the voters. And it would once again render Clean Election nonviable for many candidates and put participating candidates at an unfair disadvantage in their election campaigns. All for no good reason. This is just another attempt to re-fight the campaign that was already settled at the ballot box.

This is the second major attack on Clean Elections funding this session. LD 126 – which had its public hearing in February – would have reduced funding for Clean Election candidates by one-third across the board. We opposed that bill as a direct affront to the citizen initiative, and we oppose LD 1368 for the same reason.

We urge you to take a stand for an election system that supports the principle of government of, by and for the people, one that preserves the viability of Clean Elections. We urge you to send a message to the voters that you are listening to them and you respect their decisions. We urge you to vote ought-not-to-pass on LD 1368.

Thank you very much. We will be present for the work session.