



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: May 6, 2013

RE: LD 1309 An Act To Strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act

My name is Emily Shaw. I'm a resident of Oakland. I work as a volunteer for the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve on its Advocacy Committee. I'm here today on behalf of the League and its members to support LD 1309, which would strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act after a damaging court ruling in 2011.

The League of Women Voters has been a champion of campaign finance reform at the state and federal levels for more than three decades. The League is proud to have been a founding member of the broad-based, nonpartisan coalition that helped draft the Maine Clean Election Act. In 1995, we helped field dozens of volunteers to collect signatures to put the citizens' initiative on the ballot. We helped lead the campaign for passage of the Act. We have provided stewardship for the Act ever since, with our members taking leadership roles in protecting the Act for the entire duration of the post-referendum period.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is invested in this law.

We successfully defended the Maine Clean Election Act in court following its passage in 1996, and we were disappointed in the U. S. Supreme Court ruling of 2011, which struck down our triggered matching funds provision. That provision had been explicitly upheld in earlier court rulings, and we are troubled by the decisions of the current high court which systematically narrow the range of options available to self-governing citizens to determine the role of big money in politics and elections.

Within the narrow range of options that remain open to us, the remedy proposed here for allowing candidates in very competitive races to access supplemental public funds is carefully tailored to preserve the fundamental values that the Act bestows on the citizens of Maine. We believe that the proposal in LD 1309 will work in the public interest and will be administratively practical, attractive to candidates, and constitutional.

Without the remedies proposed by this bill, publicly funded candidates in competitive races are at the mercy of independent spenders, who are free to raise money without limit from any source – wealthy individuals, corporations, unions, and special interest groups. Candidate campaigns are starved while PACs, parties, and corporations are free to raise and spend without limit. Without the remedies proposed in this bill, many legislative candidates and all serious gubernatorial candidates will think twice about using public funding, and many will chose to fall

back into the private funding domain. When the public money goes out of Clean Elections, the private money floods in. We can expect more influence from wealthy self-serving, private interests; and more candidate reliance on and fidelity to their corporate-funded PACs.

The annual cost of public financing in Maine is truly modest in light of the fundamental public benefit it provides. The program overall costs Maine people around \$2 per person per year from the general fund. The gubernatorial portion of the program as proposed here represents about 40% of the program total, or about 80 cents per person per year. For this nominal cost, we give candidates for our highest statewide office the option to run without raising money from wealthy donors, and without the undue influence that wealthy donors can exert on public policy.

The League of Women Voters believes in public funding for elections at both the national and state level. 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.

The Maine Clean Election Act works to accomplish these important goals. We urge you to recommend Ought to Pass on LD 1309 to keep the Maine Clean Election Act strong for candidates in all state races, especially those where big money is a controlling factor.