



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman
The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: Wednesday, May 24, 2023

RE: LD 1966 An Act to Allow Candidates for County Office to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act

Good morning Senator Hickman and Representative Supica.

My name is Anna Kellar. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. I am testifying in support of LD 1966.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections has been the leading campaign finance organization in Maine for over twenty years, and is 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 nonpartisan mission has always been with and for the people of this state.

County elections are the only place where Mainers directly elect our law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other important offices in our justice system. Mainers need to be able to trust that sheriffs, district attorneys, and other county officials can carry out their duties impartially. Like judges, these officials must operate "without fear or favor." Direct elections can help ensure these offices are held accountable. But it also introduces the need for campaigns, and with that, campaign fundraising, and the potential for influence by campaign donors.

Historically, the majority of District Attorney campaigns are either self-funded (which is an issue of equity and opportunity) or funded by lawyers who expect to have cases within that district. Contributors to sheriffs include law enforcement associations — and more lawyers. Between 2014 and 2022, total spending has more than doubled in races for sheriff, DA, and county commissioner. The 2022 Cumberland County District Attorney contest cost more than \$76,000 and was a target for spending by out-of-state interests.

With judicial and local elections around the country becoming increasingly partisan and high-spending, Maine should take this chance to get ahead of the trend and insulate our justice system from potential corruption or the perception of corruption.

By expanding the Maine Clean Elections Act to allow county-level candidates to use the program, we are ensuring that these offices do not go up for sale, but remain impartial and trustworthy in the eyes of the people they serve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.