



Maine Education Association

Jesse Hargrove *President*
Beth French *Vice President*
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March 17, 2025

MEA OPPOSITION TO LD 951

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Committee:

My name is Ben Grant and I am the General Counsel of the Maine Education Association. The MEA is a labor union representing about 24,000 educators and support staff in nearly every public school in the state, in both the University of Maine and Community College systems, and in several Academy schools. In addition, thousands of retired educators continue their advocacy work through the MEA-Retired program. The MEA, and the labor movement as a whole, has a long history of supporting policies that make our elections clean, fair, and transparent. Personally, I have been involved in various ways with the Ethics Commission nearly since its inception, and thus I know we have a rigorous campaign finance regime in Maine.

However, I am here because the Maine Education Association opposes LD 951 and urges the Committee to vote ought not to pass. I'll cut right to the chase: we do not need more campaign finance regulation and requirements. Maine has a reputation – deserved – for being a clean and open state when it comes to our elections. This bill does little to advance that reputation, while at the same time potentially exacting a tremendous cost on those who wish to participate in our elections. I know the advocates of this bill are well-intentioned, but it is my view that they have lost sight of a reasonable balance between useful regulation and the time and expense made by political actors on compliance. The changes proposed in this bill will most likely cause both the political entities and the Commission to engage in extremely intrusive inquiries into the personal finances of some political donors, and to perform a baffling series of communications with those same donors in order to conduct basic functions.

First, the original source reporting invites us all to get into the weeds of the personal finances of donors that to an unprecedented degree. I can guarantee that if this law passes, there will be a Constitutional challenge by a donor under the banner of “chilling” speech through regulation. In this case, they will likely be right. I cannot see how the law would permit the government to condition certain donations on the disclosure of a donor’s personal finances – which will be necessary in order to ascertain the “original source” of money as contemplated by this proposal.

Second, with all due respect to the originators of this idea, the “donor permission” concept borders on absurdity. Donors know what they are getting into when they contribute to the political process. I cannot imagine the conversations that will happen in the future if they each have to be tracked down individually in order to spend their money on campaign expenses to which they already donated. The practicalities of this kind of back-and-forth are also head-spinning. Campaigns make hundreds of decisions, and quickly. What if an entity covered by this proposed regulation changes

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its mind on an expenditure? What if they decide to spend less on something – which donor still needs to give permission? What if a donor is on vacation, but his or her spouse is available – but has a different political persuasion? Can she or he give permission? I could go on and on with hypotheticals – but I think they all lead to one place: this will become too burdensome that it will inspire another legal challenge based on infringement of free speech. And it will probably win.

We can debate if these ideas are laudable or misguided. However, what is not up for debate is the unnecessary headaches they will cause – even if they survive legal challenges. The MEA urges a no vote.

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