



# SIERRA CLUB

## MAINE CHAPTER

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To: Members of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
From: Jacob Stern  
Date: April 5, 2023  
Re: **Testimony in Opposition to L.D. 1221: *An Act to Make Changes to the Distribution Amounts to Certain Maine Clean Election Act Candidates in Contested General Elections***

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Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, members of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

I am submitting the following testimony on behalf of Sierra Club Maine, representing over 22,000 supporters and members statewide. Founded in 1892, Sierra Club is one of our nation's oldest and largest environmental organizations. We work diligently to amplify the power of our 3.8 million members nation-wide as we work towards combating climate change and promoting a just and sustainable economy. We believe that a thriving democracy and strong voter participation laws are intrinsically linked to our state and our nation's ability to combat climate change, reduce pollution, and address other environmental harms. To that end, we urge an "ought not to pass" report on L.D. 1221: *An Act to Make Changes to the Distribution Amounts to Certain Maine Clean Election Act Candidates in Contested General Elections*.

The bill before the committee would significantly reduce the amount of clean election funds available for candidates who chose to run publicly funded campaigns. Maine is just one of three states that offers a publicly financed "clean elections" option for candidates seeking state legislative office.<sup>1</sup> By cutting the funds available for clean elections candidates, the legislature would be severely limiting the ability of clean elections candidates to compete with traditionally-funded campaigns.

In Maine, we have a "citizen legislature," meaning that many of our state-level elected officials are not career politicians or wealthy politicians. In fact, the vast majority have more traditional backgrounds, including farmers, teachers, social workers, and medical professionals - to name a few. These individuals do not necessarily have access to wealthy donors who can fund their campaigns, nor would we want them beholden to special

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<sup>1</sup> Arizona and Connecticut both offer similar programs.

interest backers. In fact, more than half of Maine state legislative candidates utilized the clean elections program to run for office in the 2020 election.<sup>2</sup>

While Sierra Club has called for significant national campaign finance reform, the truth is that political campaigns are becoming more and more costly each year. This dynamic, compounded by rising costs, creates additional systemic challenges for candidates running without connections to wealthy backers. As things stand, candidates *with* connections often easily out-raise clean election candidates. If the maximum amount of money that can be allocated to clean elections candidates is reduced, in the years ahead, we will almost certainly see a significant reduction in the number of quality candidates willing to run for legislative office.

All Mainers deserve access to clean air, water, and our beautiful natural environment. However, conserving natural resources is often at odds with the priorities of large industries that would seek to extract these resources for a short-term profit. A strong clean elections program effectively levels the playing field, not only reducing the impact well-funded industry actors are able to exert in our election, but also opening the door to a more diverse pool of Mainers to run for higher office.

Again, we urge an “ought not to pass” report on L.D. 1221: *An Act to Make Changes to the Distribution Amounts to Certain Maine Clean Election Act Candidates in Contested General Elections*. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jacob Stern

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Vice Chair, Executive Committee  
Sierra Club Maine Chapter

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<sup>2</sup> Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. “Report #17 Clean Elections Participation Rates and Outcomes.” May 2021. p. 7.