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Testimony in Support of LD 1966 **An Act to Allow Candidates for County Office to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act**

Sponsored by Rep. Benjamin Collings

Good Morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Committee on Legal and Veteran's Affairs. My name is Malory Shaughnessy and I am a resident of Westbrook. I am also a former County Commissioner for Cumberland County.

I am here today in support of LD 1966, An Act to Allow Candidates for County Office to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act. I want to thank Rep. Collings for sponsoring this bill, and Rep. Rielly for co-sponsoring. This bill would extend our well-respected citizen financing system to county candidates.

The fundamental premise of clean elections is to level the playing field of electoral politics, and to create a system of small donor public financing. Small donor public financing enables more candidates from diverse backgrounds to run and it amplifies the voices of regular people. It incentivizes candidates to seek out many supporters and garner grass roots support, not seek just a few big donors. This is a system that can effectively reduce the problem of big money in politics and the outsize influence of a few wealthy donors or corporations which might have specific agendas for those elected.

This should hold true for all key elected positions.

Why do we care about the possible outsize influence of a few large donors on legislators but not the potential influence on Sheriffs or District Attorneys, or for that matter, County Commissioners and Probate Judges? Sheriffs and District Attorneys uphold and prosecute the laws that legislators enact. Commissioners are the counties' chief elected officials, and are ultimately responsible for the fiscal operations and policy decisions affecting county government, which includes our system of jails. Probate Judges determine matters relating to the administration of the estates of deceased persons, and settle parental rights disputes. These are important positions with wide reaching impacts on individuals and communities across our state.

I am not impugning the integrity of candidates that seek private financing. I sought and received private funding for my campaigns for County Commissioner. I know many fine legislators and county officials that have been privately funded. There is no direct correlation of influence peddling or corruption with private financing of elections, but there is the potential.

There is the basic fact that as anyone who studies American politics recognizes, very few can succeed without significant financial support. Those who can offer that support are therefore enormously influential, and have far more access to candidates and officials.

In order to level the playing field for all candidates, and preserve the integrity of our elections, we should expand our clean elections system to incorporate county officials. Thank you for hearing my concerns. Please vote Ought to Pass on this legislation.