



Testimony in Opposition to LD 118:

“LD 118: An Act to Allow Candidates for Sheriff and District Attorney to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. I am here today to express our strong opposition to LD 118, which seeks to extend taxpayer-funded political campaigns to candidates for the Sheriff and District Attorney offices.

The Maine Clean Election Act (MCEA), enacted in 1996, was intended to reduce the influence of private money in politics and promote electoral fairness. However, after decades of implementation, it has become clear that this program is an expensive and ineffective use of taxpayer dollars, yielding minimal improvement in campaign transparency, electoral competition, or the integrity of elections.

Since its inception, the MCEA has cost Maine taxpayers over \$44 million, yet it has failed to achieve its stated goals.¹ LD 118 would exacerbate these failures by further expanding the program and burdening Maine taxpayers with additional costs. Below are three primary reasons why this bill is misguided:

Increased Burden on Taxpayers Without Clear Benefits

MCEA funding has grown significantly, with over \$4.5 million spent in the 2022 legislative election cycle alone. Extending this program to new offices like Sheriff and District Attorney will only add to this significant financial burden. There is no evidence to suggest that taxpayer-funded campaigns lead to more competitive elections or a more qualified pool of candidates for these positions. Instead, it forces Maine citizens to fund candidates whose policies they may strongly oppose—a fundamental violation of individual freedom.

Encouraging Partisan Use of Public Funds

The offices of Sheriff and District Attorney should remain above the fray of partisan politics. By funding campaigns for these positions with public dollars, LD 118 risks injecting unnecessary political influence into these critical roles responsible for law enforcement and public safety. Public trust in these institutions hinges on their

¹ <https://mainepolicy.org/research/legislative-guidebook-for-the-132nd-maine-legislature/>



perceived impartiality, and this bill undermines that trust by further politicizing their elections.

No Evidence of Enhanced Political Competitiveness or fairness

Advocates for the MCEA argue that it increases competition between underdog candidates and those with entrenched interests, but the data does not support this claim. A 2010 Maine Policy Review report found that the MCEA had a negligible impact on political competition in elections.² University of Maine Professor Richard J. Powell, the report's author, wrote that his "findings suggest that public funding may not be the panacea that its supporters wished it would be, nor does it substantially reduce the electoral advantage enjoyed by incumbents. Electoral competitiveness in Maine has not been appreciably affected by MCEA."

Conclusion

LD 118 is an unnecessary expansion of an already costly and ineffective system. Maine taxpayers should not be required to subsidize political campaigns they may not support. Instead, we should focus on solutions that uphold individual freedom, promote government transparency, and preserve trust in democratic institutions.

We urge this committee to reject LD 118 and prioritize policies that respect taxpayers and actually strengthen Maine's democracy. Thank you for your time and consideration.

² <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol19/iss2/7/>