

Alison P Smith 43 Carleton Street, Portland, Maine 04102

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

DATE: March 17, 2025

RE: LD 855: An Act to Limit Eligibility Under the Maine Clean Election Act

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony. I oppose LD 855.

Back in 1995, I was one of the 1,100 volunteers who collected signatures to put Clean Elections on the ballot. Alongside many friends and colleagues, I worked for passage of the referendum. After we won, and Clean Elections became law, I had many opportunities to share the inspiring story of how and why Maine citizens created the first full public funding system for state offices in the country.

For three decades I have talked with and listened to people in Maine and all over the United States who care passionately about democracy. People who, even though they fully understand why so many are disillusioned about politics, refuse to give in to cynicism. People who recognize the profound problems of money in politics and are hungry for solutions. People who are committed to doing their part to make democracy work.

Maine people have demonstrated their support for Clean Elections at the ballot in 1996 and again in 2015. For twenty-five years, in election cycle after election cycle, thousands of us have made Qualifying Contributions to the Maine Clean Election Fund in support of candidates we favor. Candidates from all over the state, from every political persuasion, have successfully used Clean Elections to run competitive, and often winning, campaigns.

LD 855 would gut this popular and successful program. No more would Maine people have what they want and what they worked so hard achieve: a campaign funding system that allows Maine people to run for office without relying on personal wealth or on raising private funds.

This is not the first time legislators have contemplated limiting access to Clean Elections. A legislator told me some years ago that first-time candidates need Clean Elections, but once they are elected, they don't. Why? Because once you are in office, you know exactly where the money is. Maybe inside the State House, this makes sense. But outside the building it's clear that this is exactly why Clean Elections must be available for reelection campaigns.

Going backwards is not what Maine people want. We do not want to undermine the progress made to lessen the influence of special interest money in Maine campaigns. We want to sever, not strengthen, the connections between private money and our state's highest elected officials. We want Clean Elections to remain a viable option for ALL state candidates, in EVERY election.

In hundreds of conversations about money in politics over many years, no one has ever suggested that campaign finance laws be weakened. And in hundreds of conversations about Clean Elections, the most frequently asked question is, "Why can't we make everyone use it?"

Thanks to constitutional constraints, we must be satisfied with a voluntary Clean Election system. But we must insist that it be faithfully implemented, and that legislators respect the will of Maine people.

Please reject LD 855 and every attempt to undermine our Clean Election program.

Thank you for your consideration.