



### **Testimony in Opposition to LD 118 & 1787:**

“An Act to Allow Candidates for Sheriff and District Attorney to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act” and “An Act to Strengthen 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 these bills, which seek 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.<sup>1</sup> These bills would exacerbate these failures by further expanding the program and placing an additional burden on Maine taxpayers. 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 session alone. Extending this program to new offices, such as the Sheriff's and District Attorney's, 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 introducing unnecessary political influence into these critical roles, which are responsible for law enforcement and public safety. Public trust in these institutions

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



hinges on their 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.<sup>2</sup> 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."

## **Additional Concerns about LD 1787**

Another serious concern with LD 1787 is the creation of new administrative burdens and the expansion of government programs without sufficient checks on spending or oversight. The bill paves the way for greater government entrenchment in Maine's electoral processes, risking the creation of costly bureaucracies that prioritize political agendas over voter trust. Worse still, by significantly increasing the number of publicly financed campaigns, LD 1787 exposes taxpayers to escalating liabilities in future budget cycles, with no corresponding improvements in voter participation or government accountability. History has shown that once programs like the Maine Clean Election Act are expanded, they become nearly impossible to scale back—even when they fail to deliver on their promises. Legislators must seriously consider whether continuing to siphon taxpayer dollars into an unproven and bloated political system is a responsible use of limited state resources.

## **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 these bills and prioritize policies that respect taxpayers and actually strengthen Maine's democracy. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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