

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

DATE: Wednesday, April 30, 2025

RE: LD 1787 An Act to Strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act

Good Afternoon Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee:

My name is Ben Gaines. I'm a resident of Brunswick. I've worked as a volunteer with Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, the Maine League of Women Voters, and Democracy Maine for several years now supporting efforts to strengthen and expand our state's popular and effective clean elections program.

I'm also an attorney in solo practice, and prior to entering the legal practice I was a professional campaign fundraiser. I believe that you will hear today from a representative from the Brennan Center speaking about what they've seen around the country with respect to the growing influence of money in low profile races such as state judiciaries. I worked some of the races that they will be speaking about.

I saw the corrupting effects of the practice of fundraising firsthand—not because the people who I was working for were bad or corrupt people—but largely because the exercise of fundraising distorted the lens through which candidates viewed their electorate. Instead of spending their days speaking with and appealing to a broad cross-section of voters, they were forced to spend their days speaking with potential donors, and the concerns they had time to listen to were limited by necessity to those of wealthy donors.

Maine runs campaigns very differently. We have a very popular, very widely accessible clean elections program that allows candidates to spend more of their time speaking to their constituents. As many of you have witnessed firsthand, it works. We want to make it stronger.

The bill before you today, LD 1787, does three things:

First, it brings County elections, specifically those for District Attorney, Sheriff, and County Commissioner, into the clean elections program. Like the judicial races that I worked on, these lower profile offices can easily become warped by the influence of big money, and like those races DAs especially suffer ethical challenges by needing to raise money from the same attorneys who they will face off against in court. I

believe that candidates for these positions will find a clean elections option attractive, and it will help to combat big dollar influence.

Second, it increases the contribution limit for seed money that can be given to gubernatorial candidates. As you know, gubernatorial candidates need to begin their campaigns much earlier than legislative races, and candidates who pursue the clean elections route are hamstrung during the early period before they can access their clean elections money. We believe that raising the seed money threshold will help alleviate that challenge without undermining the goal of clean elections.

Finally, the bill will ensure the long-term health and stability of our clean elections program by raising the statutory contribution from \$3 million to \$3.5 million. This will make the fund less susceptible to year-to-year shortfalls.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.