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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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**Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs on  
LD 118, An Act to Allow Candidates for Sheriff and District Attorney to  
Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act  
February 3, 2025**

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to sponsor LD 118, "An Act to Allow Candidates for Sheriff and District Attorney to Participate in the Maine Clean Election Act."

In recent years, money has flooded into some countywide races across our state. In 2022, nearly \$80,000 was spent by the campaigns in the primary race for Cumberland County District Attorney. On top of that, \$350,000 was spent by outside PACs promoting one of the candidates.

Obviously this is a lot of money. The last thing we want is for Mainer's to think our government works for the donor class but not for the average citizen. The same reasons why the Maine Clean Election Program is desirable for legislators and gubernatorial candidates apply to races for district attorneys and County Sheriffs.

Public officials like sheriffs and district attorneys often hold significant influence in their communities, and their election campaigns can require substantial funding to ensure effective outreach and communication with voters. Clean election programs help level the playing field by ensuring that all candidates, regardless of their personal wealth or the wealth of their supporters, have equal access to resources for campaigning.

These positions are highly influential and often involved in making decisions that affect the daily lives of residents. Allowing these candidates to access clean election funds ensures that wealth disparities do not disproportionately favor certain candidates over others, making the election process more democratic and fair. Mainer's must know that these officials operate without "fear or favor."

Taxpayer-funded election programs can reduce the potential for corruption by limiting the influence of private donors who might have vested interests in the outcome of an election. For roles like sheriff and district attorney, where impartiality is critical, public funding minimizes the appearance of favoritism or undue influence from external sources.

It is obvious to see the potential conflict of interest here. Imagine a wealthy man promises to make a significant contribution to a sheriff's or district attorney's re-election campaign. Now imagine the donor's son commits a crime. There would undoubtedly be immense pressure of the Sheriff to not arrest or on the DA to drop of lower potential charges against him.

Furthermore, some of the biggest donors to DAs are attorney who regularly deal with the DA's office. Just as we don't want our citizens to think lawmakers are bought and paid for, we should not want people to have that opinion about our elected law enforcement professionals.

This program is incredibly successful for many legislative candidates in our state. We should expand it to more offices. Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 118.