



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman
The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs
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

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

My name is Al Cleveland. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Advocacy Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. We are testifying in opposition to LD 855.

For 30 years, MCCE has advocated for Maine's Clean Election Act (MCEA) public funding system. We were there at the start to advocate for its enactment in 1996, during the early years when participation was ramping up, when budget challenges and court decisions threatened to weaken the program, and up to today when it is well-established and enjoys broad support among the candidates, voters, and the general public.

One of the clearest and most significant benefits of Clean Elections is the opportunity it provides for a wide range of Maine people to run for legislative seats. In every cycle, civic-minded Mainers choose to run in part because they can do so without engaging in the private fundraising that consumes many candidates for higher office. They appreciate the ability to keep their focus on voters in their district, and so do voters. And these advantages continue well beyond the election.

LD 855 would deny participation in Clean Elections to most candidates. It would, therefore, deny Maine people of the benefits that Clean Elections brings to our state. If the goal is to roll back the clock to the days when every legislator either raised private funds or self-funded their campaigns, this bill is a good start. That system limited who could, and who would run. Representative democracy is better served when the widest possible range of people in our communities have the chance to run, compete, and serve.

That's why Maine people took the initiative to create an alternative funding system, one that would provide both opportunity and accountability. We created a first-in-the-nation full public funding system for state offices, one that would open the door to elected office to many more Mainers, provide choices for voters, and allow sitting legislators to have a different and fair relationship with lobbyists. Through ballot initiatives in 1996 and 2015, Maine voters endorsed, then strengthened this popular program. For

twenty-five years, Mainers from all walks of life, all political affiliations, and every corner of the state have participated in Clean Elections — as candidates, and as donors. It's an integral part of our robust representative democracy.

There is simply no value in excluding qualified House and Senate candidates from our home-grown Clean Election system. Doing so would obviously undermine the program and diminish its effectiveness. And it would be a truly offensive affront to Maine voters. Please vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 855.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.