



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

DATE: April 7, 2025

RE: LD 1350 - An Act to Ban Corporate Contributions to Candidates

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

My name is Al Cleveland. I am here today as the Advocacy Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. I am testifying in support of LD 1350.

For almost 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 where it is well-established and continues to enjoy broad support among the candidates and the general public. We have been there to defend the integrity of the system, to guard against self-dealing, and to honor the original intent of the law -- to allow candidates to compete equitably for public office without having to raise private money.

MCCE favors putting real people at the center of our democracy. We trust the people to make good decisions when choosing their representatives and when deciding on ballot questions. MCCE seeks to protect and enhance the role of real people whenever possible. And we seek to minimize or eliminate anything that stands in the way of people-centered democracy.

LD 1350 aims at reducing the influence of corporate money on those who run for and hold Maine's state offices. This is an important and worthy goal, but it is not new or ground-breaking. In fact, 22 other states already ban corporations from giving to political candidates, a measure that is included in this bill. Federal candidates have been barred from accepting corporate contributions for more than a century. It's time for Maine to enact this long overdue reform.

The reasons to get corporate money out of elections were clear back at the turn of the last century. Corporations and other business arrangements are legal entities, created by governments, that receive favorable tax treatment, limit liability, and enjoy other protections that allow for the accumulation of

capital and the generation of profits for owners and shareholders. Allowing that accumulated capital to influence the political process creates a dangerous, self-reinforcing feedback loop of influence.

While the legal landscape is not favorable, there are incremental reforms that are allowable under today's limited constitutional framework. They are worth making, and they will make a difference.

To be clear, the bill does not change which individuals may make political donations. The ban is only on money in the corporate treasury, money that is necessarily tied to the vested interest of the company. Workers, CEOs, board members, shareholders, and other people are free to make their own contributions to candidates under the statutory limits.

Mark Hanna, a 19th century industrialist and political power broker famously said, "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money and I can't remember what the second one is." He went on to mastermind a record-breaking multi-million dollar presidential campaign -- in 1886!

We disagree with Hanna. We believe that people must always be at the heart of our politics, and our campaign finance laws must be made in the public, not the private, interest. Corporate interests are and will remain well-represented in the halls of the State House, but the elected representatives and senators are here to serve the people of Maine. Every step we take to separate private, special interest money from our highest elected officials is a step that strengthens our democracy.

On behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1350.

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