



Testimony in Opposition to LD 818:

“An Act to Allow Expenditure of Maine Clean Election Act Funding for the Care of Candidates' Dependents”

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. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in opposition to LD 818, "An Act to Allow Expenditure of Maine Clean Election Act Funding for the Care of Candidates' Dependents."

Maine Policy Institute has long opposed the Maine Clean Elections Act (MCEA) as an inefficient and inappropriate use of taxpayer dollars that distorts Maine's electoral process. The system has failed to achieve its intended purpose of reducing the influence of private money in politics and instead serves as a subsidy for candidates who choose to rely on public funding rather than engage with voters and raise support through voluntary contributions. As noted in a 2012 Maine Policy Review Article by UMaine Professor Richard Powell, the "MCEA has not had a significant impact on increasing electoral competition for the Maine Legislature."¹ In summary, incumbents with established brands and resources are just as likely to win as before the MCEA.

LD 818 further exacerbates these problems by expanding the scope of permissible expenditures under the MCEA to include dependent care—an unnecessary and unjustifiable use of public funds.

The MCEA was initially established to provide candidates with taxpayer dollars for campaign expenses, not to cover personal costs.² Allowing these funds for childcare or other dependent care significantly departs from the program's stated mission. It sets a dangerous precedent for additional personal expenditures to be covered in the future. What stops future expansions to cover mortgage payments, groceries, or other personal living costs if dependent care is allowed? The MCEA has already misallocated taxpayer dollars; LD 818 furthers this problem.

Moreover, this expansion raises significant concerns regarding oversight and accountability. Unlike traditional campaign expenditures—such as advertising or staff salaries—dependent care costs are inherently personal and challenging to regulate. This creates a substantial risk of abuse, further diminishing public trust in a program lacking transparency and efficiency.

¹ <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1081&context=mpr>

² <https://www.cato.org/commentary/maines-clean-elections-are-not-more-competitive>



Additionally, this bill creates an unfair advantage for publicly funded candidates over those who rely on voluntary contributions. Candidates who opt out of the MCEA system must personally cover these expenses while their taxpayer-funded opponents receive public dollars for personal childcare or dependent care. This disparity undermines the principle of a fair electoral system and distorts the campaign finance landscape.

Instead of expanding the scope of an already flawed program, the Legislature should focus on eliminating the MCEA altogether and allowing candidates to raise funds through voluntary contributions. This would ensure that those seeking public office are accountable to their supporters rather than taxpayers.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to reject LD 818 and work toward repealing the MCEA to restore integrity and fairness to Maine's campaign finance system. Thank you for your time and consideration.