



Testimony in Support of LD 855:

“An Act to Limit Eligibility Under the Maine Clean Election Act”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and 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 provide testimony in support of LD 855, "An Act to Limit Eligibility Under the Maine Clean Election Act."

Maine's Clean Election Act (MCEA) was originally designed to reduce money's influence in politics and promote competitive elections. However, over the years, the program has instead functioned as a taxpayer-funded subsidy for career politicians, often allowing them to run for office repeatedly without having to cultivate true grassroots financial support. LD 855 introduces a common-sense limitation on participation by restricting individuals to only one publicly funded campaign every 15 years. This reform is necessary to ensure that the system is used responsibly and in a manner that aligns with the principles of fairness, fiscal responsibility, and political diversity.

Protecting Taxpayers

Since its inception, the MCEA has cost Maine taxpayers over \$44 million, with nearly \$5 million spent on legislative races in 2022 alone.¹ The burden of financing multiple campaigns for the same individuals over short intervals is an unsustainable and inefficient use of public funds. Limiting participation to once every 15 years, LD 855 prevents perennial candidates from repeatedly accessing taxpayer money. It ensures that Clean Election funds are available for a broader array of candidates who may lack access to private donations.

Promoting Competitive Elections

One of the primary justifications for publicly financed elections is to encourage more competition by lowering barriers to entry for new candidates. However, in practice, the Clean Elections system has become a tool that entrenches incumbents rather than fostering new leadership.² Politicians who can repeatedly access taxpayer funds without demonstrating sustained grassroots fundraising efforts create an uneven playing field. A 15-year eligibility limit would encourage fresh voices and ideas while preventing any single candidate from monopolizing public funding for multiple election cycles.

¹ <https://mainepolicy.org/research/legislative-guidebook-for-the-132nd-maine-legislature/>

² <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol19/iss2/7/>



Reducing Waste and Abuse

The current system allows candidates to receive substantial sums of taxpayer money without accountability for campaign outcomes. This allows for waste, as candidates with no serious intention of winning can exploit the system for personal gain. LD 855 introduces a reasonable check on this system by preventing individuals from repeatedly using public funds without meaningful electoral success or broad-based support.

Aligning with Fiscal Prudence

Maine's fiscal resources are limited, and taxpayer dollars should be directed toward essential public services rather than continuous financing of political campaigns. At a time when Mainers are facing economic pressures from inflation, high energy costs, and rising property taxes, public funds must be allocated efficiently. Limiting participation in the Clean Elections program to once every 15 years ensures that public financing remains a tool for fostering fair elections for those truly without far-reaching political experience or connections rather than a recurring entitlement for career politicians.

Conclusion

LD 855 represents a prudent reform that upholds the original intent of the Maine Clean Election Act while ensuring that it remains fair, competitive, and fiscally responsible. This bill protects taxpayers, promotes electoral diversity, and curtails waste by placing reasonable restrictions on repeated participation. We urge the committee to support LD 855. Thank you for your time and consideration.