



STATE OF MAINE
COMMISSION ON GOVERNMENTAL ETHICS
AND ELECTION PRACTICES
135 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0135

To: Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
From: Jonathan Wayne, Executive Director
Date: February 13, 2026
Re: Proposed Amendment to LD 2000

**2/20/2026
work
session**

Spending by Party Committees on Ballot Questions

The Ethics Commission would appreciate consideration by the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee of an amendment to the Commission's agency bill, LD 2000, to clarify how the committees of political parties should report contributions received and expenditures made to support or oppose ballot questions. The relevant statute is 21-A M.R.S. § 1017-A.

Since 2003, state party committees have been required to submit campaign finance reports of their spending to influence ballot questions before and after the relevant election.¹ At a meeting on February 10, 2026, the members of the Ethics Commission approved submitting to the Legislature the attached changes to 21-A M.R.S. §§ 1017-A and 1052(2-A), which would:

- add an introductory sentence to 21-A M.R.S. § 1017-A,
- make it explicit that party committees must identify in their campaign finance reports any ballot questions the committee is supporting or opposing financially,
- require party committees to disclose the amounts spent to influence those ballot questions and the names and addresses of payees,
- exempt party committees from needing to file duplicate campaign finance reports as a ballot question committee, and
- synchronize two statutes to clarify that, under a current exception, if a PAC wishes to spend money to influence a ballot question, the PAC may spend up to \$10,000 without needing to separately register and file campaign finance reports as a ballot question committee.

¹ P.L. 2003, ch. 203 required state party committees to file "reports of spending to influence referenda, initiatives, bond issues or constitutional amendments" six days before and 42 days after the election. 21-A M.R.S. § 1017-A(4-A). In 2011, 21-A M.R.S. § 1017-A(2) was amended to require both state and local party committees to report expenditures to influence candidate *and* ballot question elections. P.L. 2011, ch. 389, § 16.

Unallocated Language to Address IT Problems that Disadvantaged Some Maine Clean Election Act Candidates

In addition, I would like to propose that unallocated language be added to LD 2000 that would extend the time for some candidates to qualify for Maine Clean Election Act (MCEA) funding. This seems necessary because of the unexpectedly long period of time it took our IT vendor to convert campaign finance information from our old database/eFiling system to our new system.

For 28 days beginning on January 15, 2026, dozens of candidates wished to register with our office but could not register online in our eFiling system. Moreover, these candidates could not use the Commission's online qualifying contribution service to receive qualifying contributions by credit card. Many of these candidates delayed registering altogether. The 28-day delay represents 25% or more of the time these candidates will have to qualify for MCEA funding this year. This is a significant reduction in the time they have to qualify.

I believe this delay by the Commission's IT vendor has resulted in an unfair situation in which 2/3 of our MCEA candidates have enjoyed the regular opportunity to qualify for public funds, but the other 1/3 of MCEA candidates have a significantly diminished period to qualify. I therefore recommend the following unallocated language:

For legislative candidates seeking Maine Clean Election Act funding in 2026 who registered with the Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices after January 15, 2026, notwithstanding the definition of "qualifying period" in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 21-A, section 1122, subsection 8, the qualifying period is extended for those candidates until May 21, 2026.

This represents a 28-day extension for candidates who registered with our office after January 15, 2026. Thank you for your consideration of this amendment.

Proposed Committee Amendment – LD 2000

21-A M.R.S. § 1017-A. Reports of contributions and expenditures by party committees

The committees of political parties qualified under section 301 shall file campaign finance reports on forms prescribed by the commission as required by this section.

1. Contributions. A party committee shall report all contributions in cash or in kind from a single contributor that in the aggregate total more than \$200. The party committee shall report the name, mailing address, occupation and place of business of each contributor. Contributions of \$200 or less must be reported, and these contributions may be reported as a lump sum.

2. Expenditures to influence a campaign. A party committee shall report all expenditures made to influence a campaign, as defined in section 1052, subsection 1. The party committee shall report:

A. ~~The name of e~~Each candidate, ~~political action committee, or~~ ballot question committee ~~or party committee~~; supported or opposed by the expenditure;

B. The office sought by a candidate and the district that the candidate seeks to represent; ~~and~~

B-1. The amount spent to support or oppose each candidate or ballot question;

C. The date, ~~amount~~ and purpose of each expenditure, which must identify the candidate or ballot question supported or opposed; and

D. The name and address of each payee.

3. Other expenditures. Operational expenses and other expenditures that are not made to influence a campaign, as defined in section 1052, subsection 1 must be reported separately. The party committee shall report:

A. The name and address of each payee;

B. The purpose for the expenditure; and

C. The date and amount of each expenditure.

4. Filing schedule. [Repealed]

4-A. Filing schedule. A state party committee shall file its reports according to the following schedule. All reports required under paragraphs A, B and C must be filed by 11:59 p.m. on the day of the filing deadline.

A. A state party committee shall file quarterly reports:

- (1) On January 15th, which must be complete up to December 31st;
- (2) On April 10th, which must be complete up to March 31st;
- (3) On July 15th, which must be complete up to June 30th; and
- (4) On October 5th, which must be complete up to September 30th.

B. During any year in which primary and general elections are held, a state party committee shall file primary and general election reports in addition to the reports required under paragraph A:

- (1) On the 11th day before the date on which the election is held, which must be complete up to the 14th day before that date; and
- (2) On the 42nd day after the date on which the election is held, which must be complete up to the 35th day after that date.

C. In an election year other than a year described in paragraph B, if a state party committee has received contributions or made expenditures for the purpose of influencing a ballot question election, a special election or a municipal candidate or referendum election subject to Title 30-A, section 2502, the committee shall file preelection and post-election reports:

- (1) On the 11th day before the date on which the election is held, which must be complete up to the 14th day before that date; and
- (2) On the 42nd day after the date on which the election is held, which must be complete up to the 35th day after that date.

D. A state party committee that files an election report under paragraph B or C is not required to file a quarterly report under paragraph A when the deadline for that quarterly report falls within 10 days of the filing deadline established in paragraph B or C.

E. If a state party committee is required to file a report 11 days before an election pursuant to paragraph B or C, the committee shall report any single contribution of \$5,000 or more received or any single expenditure of \$1,000 or more made after the 14th day before the election and more than 24 hours before 5:00 p.m. on the day of the election within 24 hours of that contribution or expenditure. The committee is not required to include in this report expenditures for overhead expenses or compensation paid to an employee or other member of the campaign staff who has received payments at regular intervals that have been disclosed in previously filed campaign finance reports. As used in this paragraph, “overhead expenses” includes, but is not limited to, rent, utility payments, taxes, insurance premiums or similar administrative expenses.

Same
changes to
this
paragraph
as printed
in LD 2000

4-B. Filing schedule for municipal, district and county party committees. Municipal, district and county party committees shall file reports according to the following schedule.

A. Reports filed during an election year must be filed with the commission by 11:59 p.m. on:

- (1) July 15th and be complete as of June 30th;
- (2) The 11th day before the date on which the general election is held and must be complete up to the 14th day before that date; and
- (3) January 15th and be complete as of December 31st.

B. Reports filed during a nonelection year must be filed by 11:59 p. m. on:

- (1) July 15th and be complete as of June 30th; and
- (2) January 15th and be complete as of December 31st.

C. A committee shall report any single contribution of \$5,000 or more received or any expenditure of \$1,000 or more made after the 14th day before a general or special election and more than 24 hours before 11:59 p.m. on the day of the election within 24 hours of that contribution or expenditure. The committee is not required to include in this report expenditures for overhead expenses or compensation paid to an employee or other member of the campaign staff who has received payments at regular intervals that have been disclosed in previously filed campaign finance reports. As used in this paragraph, “overhead expenses” includes, but is not limited to, rent, utility payments, taxes, insurance premiums or similar administrative expenses.

Same changes to this paragraph as printed in LD 2000

21-A M.R.S. § 1052. Definitions

As used in this subchapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

1. Campaign. “Campaign” means any course of activities to influence the nomination or election of a candidate or to initiate or influence any of the following ballot measures:

- A.** A people’s veto referendum under the Constitution of Maine, Article IV, Part Third, Section 17;
- B.** A direct initiative of legislation under the Constitution of Maine, Article IV, Part Third, Section 18;
- C.** An amendment to the Constitution of Maine under Article X, Section 4;

D. A referendum vote on a measure enacted by the Legislature and expressly conditioned upon ratification by a referendum vote under the Constitution of Maine, Article IV, Part Third, Section 19;

E. The ratification of the issue of bonds by the State or any agency thereof; and

F. Any county or municipal referendum.

2. Committee. “Committee” means any political action committee or ballot question committee and includes any agent of a political action committee or ballot question committee.

2-A. Ballot question committee. “Ballot question committee” means a person that receives contributions or makes expenditures aggregating in excess of \$5,000 for the purpose of initiating or influencing a campaign, other than a campaign for the nomination or election of a candidate. ~~The term “ballot question committee” does not include a political action committee or an exempt donor.~~ Party committees and exempt donors do not need to register as ballot question committees. A political action committee is exempt from registering as a ballot question committee if it meets the requirements for the exception in section 1052-A, subsection 1-A, paragraph A.

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Unallocated Language

For legislative candidates seeking Maine Clean Election Act funding in 2026 who registered with the Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices after January 15, 2026, notwithstanding the definition of “qualifying period” in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 21-A, section 1122, subsection 8, the qualifying period is extended for those candidates until May 21, 2026.

SUMMARY

The amendment clarifies that party committees must disclose in their campaign finance reports the amounts they have spent to support or oppose candidates or ballot questions. The amendment adds party committees to the list of entities that are exempt from the definition of ballot question committee. The amendment also extends the qualifying period by 28 days for legislative candidates seeking Maine Clean Election Act funding who registered after January 15, 2026 and were therefore disadvantaged by problems in the database systems of the Maine Ethics Commission. This represents about one-third of the legislative candidates expected to participate in the Maine Clean Election Act program in 2026.