



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Garrett Mason
The Honorable Representative Louis J. Luchini, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 14, 2018

RE: LD 1780 An Act To Transfer Funds to the Maine Clean Election Fund To Provide Adequate Funding for Maine Clean Election Fund Candidates

My name is Penelope Hamblin. I'm a resident of South Portland. I am here today as a volunteer for the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League and its members support LD 1780.

The League of Women Voters is invested in the Maine Clean Election law. We helped lead the campaign for passage of the Act. We have provided stewardship for the law ever since.

We believe that public financing of election campaigns helps to combat undue influence of money in politics, and enables candidates to compete more equitably for public office. The Maine Clean Election Act works to accomplish these important goals. The annual cost of public financing in Maine is truly modest in light of the fundamental public benefit it provides.

The Act calls for a "dedicated, non-lapsing, interest-bearing fund," that would provide sufficient resources during high-demand cycles, specifically the quadrennial peak during gubernatorial elections. We wanted to ensure that decisions about funding the Act would never be political or based in any way on which candidates were running. The voters asked for an operating margin of 20%, which the legislature has never provided. If that 20 percent had been in place, we would not be here today.

We are now at a historic crossroads. Nine candidates for governor have declared intent to run clean election campaigns. However, the fund has not been allowed to build the reserves to cover a potentially record number of qualifying candidates. Instead, excess balances have been swept from the fund to cover short-term fiscal needs, with the promise that the funds would be repaid if they were needed. Well, this year they may be needed. Now is the time for the rainy day fund to repay the debt and guarantee that Clean Elections candidates have the funds they need to run competitive campaigns.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'd be happy to answer any questions.