



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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To: Senator Nancy B. Sullivan, Senate Chair
Representative Pamela Jabar Trinward, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

From: Michelle A. Small, League of Women Voters of Maine

Re: Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 310, An Act Regarding Grassroots Lobbying

Date: February 18, 2009

My name is Michelle Small, and I live in Brunswick. I am the volunteer Treasurer of the League of Women Voters of Maine, the organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. I am here this afternoon to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 310, An Act Regarding Grassroots Lobbying.

Due to its concerns about citizens' rights, the League of Women Voters has for some time supported lobbying disclosure reform to provide information about the pressures exerted on the policy-making process and to guarantee citizens the ability to influence the process.

In some cases, the total amounts being spent on grassroots lobbying campaigns may well exceed the total amounts being spent on direct lobbying activities, which are required to be disclosed. Today, a professional grassroots lobbying firm can spend large sums on a paid advertising campaign to stimulate grassroots lobbying for a bill that benefits industry, labor, an advocacy group or other special interests.

Therefore, the League of Women Voters favors the adoption of grassroots lobbying disclosure provisions to ensure that the public receives basic information about the large sums being spent on grassroots lobbying activities designed to stimulate lobbying actions by the public.

That being said, the League of Women Voters of Maine is concerned that the threshold dollar amount of \$2,000 that triggers the disclosure provisions in LD 310 might be too low and might have a chilling effect on grassroots lobbying by small non-profit organizations that speak on behalf of the people. For example, as the Treasurer of a non-profit organization that has no employees and relies exclusively on volunteers to carry out its mission, I can personally testify to the hardship that such a low threshold might impose on the League of Women Voters of Maine.

Currently, the League mails its quarterly newsletter to all recipients in one bulk mailing and maintains email lists that include non-members and a Web site that is accessible to the public. Without employees, the League would find it difficult to segregate communications with members, prospective members and non-members. The total annual budget for the newsletter and the Web

site are just about \$2,800. Even if these communications did not trigger the threshold, the League would still be responsible for making sure they did not, placing an additional compliance burden on a volunteer Board of Directors.

While the League wholeheartedly supports the goal of grassroots lobbying disclosure, it suggests some changes to the bill to exempt small non-profit organizations.