



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF LD 1869

Maine State Legislature Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

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Chair Hickman, Chair Supica, and honorable members of the committee, my name is Madeline Malisa, and I am a Visiting Fellow at the Opportunity Solutions Project. OSP is a non-partisan, non-profit

organization. I'm also a resident of Portland and a Maine voter. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1869.

Billionaires shouldn't be able to fund Maine elections. But current law allows them to. In fact, special interest groups can funnel unrestricted money into election administration without consequences. These groups aren't bound by campaign finance laws like the members of this committee. And their donations aren't subject to the biannual legislative budget process.

The funding of election operations, and where and how funds are being spent, are decisions that you - Maine lawmakers should make - and not unaccountable special interest groups. Private funding of elections effectively allows private actors to influence who the winners and losers will be. This bill will safeguard Maine elections from outside influence by requiring that all costs and expenses relating to conducting elections be paid for with lawfully appropriated public funds.

In 2020, Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan sent \$400 million to election offices across the country under the guise of alleviating the burden of COVID-19-related costs.¹ These grants - known as Zuckerbucks - found their way into nearly every state, including Maine.²⁻³ Most Zuckerbucks were provided to the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), a left-leaning non-profit run by a former Obama Foundation fellow.⁴ Despite being labeled as COVID-19 response grants, only a fraction of the money was used to buy PPE.⁵ The funds were used predominantly to get out the vote in select jurisdictions.⁶

Across the country, CTCL decided which counties should get money, how much they should receive, and what the private funds could be spent on. CTCL awarded Pennsylvania more than \$25 million in Zuckerbucks, with 92 percent of the funds going to counties won by Biden.⁷ CTCL gave Georgia \$45 million in Zuckerbucks and Biden counties got nearly four times more Zuckerbucks per registered voter than Trump counties.⁸ And in Wisconsin, CTCL spent \$8.5 million in just five Democrat cities.⁹

Here in Maine, CTCL awarded over \$3.5 million in Zuckerbucks without legislative approval or transparency to voters. Portland received \$284,584 and Bangor received \$272,104.¹⁰ Lewiston, Auburn, and South Portland were also awarded grants of over \$200,000.¹¹

In 2020, it was Mark Zuckerberg who spent hundreds of millions of dollars circumventing the legislative processes to privately fund election administration. But in the next election, it could be a different wealthy tech tycoon or special interest group with Maine elections in their sights.

Banning billionaires from funding election administration has received bipartisan support across the country. Democratic Governor Tom Wolf signed Pennsylvania's ban into law, the Democrat-controlled Virginia Senate passed their bill unanimously, and both chambers in South Carolina passed a ban with unanimous support.

In the last three years, 25 states have passed bans or restrictions on Zuckerbucks including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Texas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Utah, and West Virginia.¹²

Likewise, political operatives should not be funding election administration in Maine. LD 1869 will ensure that elections are paid for with lawfully appropriated public funds. Thank you and I'm happy to answer any questions.

References

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- ¹ CEIR, “Priscilla Chan and Mark Zuckerberg increase support for safe and reliable voting by \$19.5 million,” Center for Election Innovation & Research (2020), <https://electioninnovation.org/press/chan-zuckerberg-increase-2020-election-support>.
- ² “Press Release: CTCL Receives Additional \$100M Contribution to Support Critical Work of Election Officials,” Center for Tech and Civic Life (2020), <https://www.techandcivicle.org/100m>.
- ³ Tiana Epps-Johnson, Center for Tech and Civic Life, <https://www.techandcivicle.org/team/tiana-epps-johnson>.
- ⁴ Hayden Dublois and Tyler Lamensky, “Zuckerberg went down to Georgia: How Zuckerbucks influenced the Georgia elections,” Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/paper/zuckerbucks.influenced-georgia-elections>.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ Alli Fick and Tyler Lamensky, “How Zuckerbucks Infiltrated the Wisconsin Election,” Foundation for Government Accountability (2021), <https://thefga.org/research/zuckerbucks-wisconsin-election>.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Grant reports obtained through public records requests received by the Foundation for Government Accountability.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Sarah Lee, Hayden Ludwig, “States banning or restricting Zuck Bucks,” Capital Research Center, (September 16, 2022), <https://capitalresearch.org/article/states-banning-zuck-bucks>.