



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman  
The Honorable Chris Caiazzo, Co-Chairs  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

FROM: John Brautigam, Legal Counsel

DATE: February 4, 2022

RE: Funding for Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices

CC: Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government  
Jonathan Wayne, Esq. Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices

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We are writing in advance of the supplemental budget process to urge your strongest consideration for funding needed for the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices, and for legislation related to its mission.

MCCE and our partner organization the League of Women Voters of Maine believe that the mission of the Ethics Commission is vital to our democracy. No less than public health, civil defense, or safe roadways – funding the Ethics Commission’s work is critical for ensuring public confidence and the credible function of our elections and campaign finance regulations.

Over the years, the Clean Election Fund has been periodically “raided” by past Legislatures. At the latest accounting, the Fund is owed over \$6.2 million. Due to the quadrennial nature of election cycles, it is important that funds be allowed to accumulate in the Clean Election Fund for it to serve its purpose. We trust that no further such “raid” is contemplated in this supplemental budget cycle.

That said, we have two specific concerns. Over the years, the Ethics Commission has had no choice but to pay for basic and essential staff and technology expenses from the Clean Election Fund, which we believe is not consistent with the statute and the purpose for which that Fund was created and re-validated by Maine voters.

We will strongly support a proposal by Director Wayne to restore general funding for staff and IT expenses that have been temporarily paid out of the Clean Election Fund. We hope that a proposal to do this will either be included in the Biennial Budget presented to the Legislature, or added to that budget

during the Appropriations process. This will allow the Ethics Commission the resources necessary to carry out its broad mission without inappropriately drawing on the Clean Election Fund.

Secondly, we strongly support [LD 1658](#), being heard in the State and Local Government Committee. This bill would bring campaign finance and disclosure of the state's largest municipalities up to the standard currently in place for state races. These municipal election campaigns are becoming larger and more expensive each cycle, and information needed by the public for those campaigns is sorely lacking. This bill—if fully funded—would remedy that problem. It does not have a fiscal note as of this date, but a rough estimate of \$100,000 in IT costs plus one additional staff person has been suggested. These expenditures would be in the public interest. The VLA committee's expertise in campaign finance reporting and oversight of the Ethics Commission's budget suggest that this committee may also wish to review LD 1658.

In the coming weeks we will be in touch with additional information and to request your full support for the vital mission of the Ethics Commission, and to honor its reasonable funding needs.

Thank you for your consideration.