

Testimony in Support of LD 749 “An Act To Increase the Transparency of the “Maine Open Checkbook” Website”

Senator Claxton, Representative Martin, and distinguished members of the Committee State and Local Government, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as the policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of LD 749.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center has always been committed to redefining the role of government in the lives of Maine people, which includes making government more transparent to its citizens. LD 749 would increase transparency by requiring Maine Open Checkbook to include the names of all recipients of state grants and track and record all payments made by quasi-public entities of the State, and the dollar value of credits awarded through all state economic development programs.

Maine is merely average when it comes to transparency in government. Maine Open Checkbook received a C+ grade in transparency when evaluated on the site’s comprehensiveness, whether all information could be accessed on one page, and how well information could be searched and downloaded.¹ In addition, Maine was ranked 41st in transparency when compared to the rest of the country.² While this is more impressive than the state’s rating in 2015 from the Center for Public Integrity³, it is clear that Maine Open Checkbook needs to be revamped or include more information to be fully transparent and in-sync with other states’ level of accountability.

This bill would give the public more complete access to expenditures made by state government and quasi-public entities. While state grant recipients, payments made by quasi-public entities, and the dollar value for all credits awarded through state economic development programs are technically accessible to the public already, putting this information on Maine Open Checkbook would give concerned citizens and researchers easier access to it. After all, the citizens of Maine are the ones funding state government, and should therefore have as much information about how government spends their money as reasonably possible.

Maine Open Checkbook was supposed to be incrementally built over time to include graphs, comparative reports, and revenue information.⁴ However, this has not become a reality and the

¹ <https://uspirg.org/reports/usp/following-money-2016-0>

² <https://uspirg.org/reports/usp/following-money-2016-0>

³ <https://publicintegrity.org/accountability/maine-gets-f-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/>

⁴ <https://bangordailynews.com/bdn-maine/community/lepage-announces-launch-of-open-checkbook-transparency-website/>

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website has fallen short on what it was supposed to become. This bill would help build up Maine Open Checkbook to make sure it is transformed into what it was envisioned to be. To that end, we urge the committee to vote, "Ought to Pass" on LD 749. Thank you.