



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Rodney Wittemore
The Honorable Representative Roland Danny Martin, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: April 15, 2015

RE: L.D. 957 - RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of
Maine To Provide for the Popular Election of the Attorney General, Secretary of
State and Treasurer of State.

My name is Polly Ward. I am a resident of Freeport. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am here today as a volunteer member of the League's Advocacy Committee to testify *Neither-for-nor-Against* LD 957, a resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Provide for the Popular Election of the Attorney General, Secretary of State and Treasurer of State.

The League of Women Voters supports efforts to give voters greater input into selecting the representatives who govern our state and set our public policy. We endorse measures that increase transparency in government and elections. On the other hand, we work against the influence of big money in politics, and we advocate for a professional and competent civil service. We reject the notion that Maine must change its system just because it doesn't mirror election processes in other states. Raising a constitutional amendment is a serious issue that requires serious examination and should not be undertaken without proper study and assessment of the impact.

Constitutional officers are a key part of the Executive Branch of our government, and as such, offer a vital check and balance on the power of both the Governor and the Legislature. More importantly, they play crucial roles in making sure our elections are fair and operate within the law. There would seem to be a clear conflict of interest if they become subject to the same election laws that they are bound to regulate. Who would investigate if a sitting Attorney General is suspected of campaign finance abuse? And, how can the Secretary of State oversee an election in which he or she is running for office?

Furthermore, publicly electing our constitutional officers may further politicize these positions, opening their campaigns up to outside money and influence from out-of-state sources. Once in office, elected officers may be influenced in the conduct of their office by major campaign donors. And they may feel called upon to replace nonpartisan professional staff with political appointees.

Secrecy in government decision-making is seldom a good thing and the process by which we select our constitutional officers should be scrutinized and made more open to the public. But this is a representative democracy, and we entrust our legislators to make hundreds of decisions on our behalf every year. This is one of them. In fact, we have considered it so important that it has been enshrined in our constitution.

Our system is built on public participation in selecting the people who make and enforce our laws. But it's also built on public discussion and debate about the process. What is good for other states may not suit our needs and our current process has served the State of Maine for a long time. We believe that the impact and procedure of popular election of constitutional officers should be carefully studied before the State embarks on an entirely new process for filling these roles. The League of Women Voters of Maine enters this testimony as *Neither-for-nor-Against* LD 957.

Thank you.