



March 13, 2023

Sen. Craig Hickman, Chair
Rep. Laura Supica, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
Maine State Legislature
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 812 An Act to Assist Clerks in Facilitating Elections and to Improve Access to In-person Absentee Voting for Working People by Increasing Time for Absentee Ballot Processing and In-person Voting

Chair Hickman, Chair Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs: My name is David O'Brien and I am Policy Director for RepresentUs, the nation's leading nonpartisan anti-corruption organization. RepresentUs is submitting testimony today in support of LD 812, as we believe it will enhance clerks' ability to process a growing number of absentee ballots and will improve Mainers' access to the ballot through weekend voting.

RepresentUs is a nonpartisan advocacy organization dedicated to the idea that the government should be representative of and accountable to the people. It advocates for policies to strengthen our democracy and provides activists with the resources and training to bring meaningful change. Regarding the electoral process, we work to pass powerful state and local laws that expand voter access, make elections more representative, and enhance election security.

LD 812 would do the following:

1. Allow 14 days for the processing of absentee ballots instead of 7 as in current law;
2. Adjust the hours for a member of the public to make a written request of the clerk to inspect ballot applications and envelopes before they are processed;
3. Require certain municipalities to offer opportunities for weekend absentee voting in the presence of a clerk;
4. Require the Secretary of State to provide grants to certain municipalities for the purpose of expanding the hours available for absentee voting.

Absentee voting is growing in popularity because it provides voters flexibility. In 2022, nearly 23 percent of Maine voters used absentee ballots. Overall, there has been an increasing trend in use of absentee ballots in Maine, with a large spike in November 2020 during the pandemic. With the rise in the number of absentee ballots being returned, clerks would benefit from having additional time to process ballots.

The bill also proposes changing the timeframe when members of the public can make requests to inspect absentee ballots. Allowing the public to inspect absentee ballots is an important election transparency measure and helps demonstrate to the public that our elections are fair and safe. Making it so members of the public must make their request to inspect ballots by 5 pm the day before, instead of 9 am the day of, is a reasonable change that will help clerks better manage the election process.

Lastly, LD 812 would require certain municipalities to offer opportunities for absentee voting in the presence of a clerk on the weekend in the days leading up to Election Day. We understand that some of our partners on the ground in Maine, including the League of Women Voters and the League of Conservation Voters, have suggestions for how to best implement this weekend voting provision and we would support their recommendations. However, in general RepresentUs is in favor of accommodating some weekend voting in order to increase access to the ballot for people who have busy weekday schedules.

For these reasons, and with the recommended changes noted above, we urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 812.