

## 129th MAINE LEGISLATURE

## FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2019

**Legislative Document** 

No. 534

H.P. 391

House of Representatives, January 31, 2019

An Act To Make Ballot Questions Easier To Read and Understand for Maine Voters

(EMERGENCY)

Reference to the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs suggested and ordered printed.

ROBERT B. HUNT Clerk

R(+ B. Hunt

Presented by Representative ANDREWS of Paris.
Cosponsored by Senator LUCHINI of Hancock and
Representatives: DILLINGHAM of Oxford, HICKMAN of Winthrop, MOONEN of Portland,
PICKETT of Dixfield, STEWART of Presque Isle, STROM of Pittsfield, Senators: KEIM of
Oxford, LIBBY of Androscoggin.

1 Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not 2 become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and Whereas, the ability of voters to make informed choices on ballot questions is 3 essential for the proper functioning of the State's citizen democracy; and 4 5 Whereas, this Act makes necessary improvements to the process of presenting referendum questions to the voters; and 6 Whereas, it is possible that referend mmay be sent to the voters before the 90-day 7 8 period has expired; and Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within 9 the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as 10 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, 11 12 therefore, Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows: 13 Sec. 1. 21-A MRSA §906, sub-§6, ¶B, as repealed and replaced by PL 1993, c. 14 352, §3, is amended to read: 15 The Secretary of State shall write the question in a simple, clear, concise and 16 direct manner that describes the subject matter of the people's veto or direct initiative. 17 The question must have a readability score, as determined by a recognized instrument 18 for measuring adult literacy levels, equivalent to no higher than a 6th-grade reading 19 level and unambiguously state what the effect of a "yes" or "no" vote may have. 20 21 Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved. 22 **SUMMARY** 23 24 This bill requires that ballot questions be written in a manner that is understandable to the greatest number of voters possible, determined to be for adult literacy at the 6th-grade 25 reading level, which is the standard used for other important official state documents, 26 including for the Maine Residents Property Tax Program, notices regarding child support, 27 municipal property tax deferral programs for seniors and temporary assistance for needy 28 families. This bill also requires ballot questions to unambiguously state what the effect of 29 a "yes" or "no" vote may have. 30