

Testimony in Opposition to LD34: An Act to Require a Person to Show Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting

Good day, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and the members of the Committee for Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Cheryl Harkins. I reside in South Portland. I am Advocate with both Homeless Voices for Justice and Homeless Advocacy for All. I'm a Board Member of the Statewide Homeless Council and with the Maine Continuum of Care. I am here today to speak against the passage of LD34. If a person is homeless they generally carry all of their important paperwork, their identifications, money, clothing, in a bag or knapsack. Hopefully they are lucky enough to find a storage unit for the remainder of their belongings. Tents are a luxury, although this time of year, living outside can literally cost you're your life. Homelessness is at a crisis level, in Portland especially. Eviction courts are overflowing. If a person is forced to seek refuge inside due to extreme weather, conditions like we just encountered, they are not allowed to bring their belongings inside with them.

Many of the unhoused in tents actually braved the -51 degree wind chills so what little they had left was not stolen or vandalized. If they have to leave their campsites even for a few minutes, they run the risk of a front end loader appearing on the scene (this currently happens in the City of Portland, as ordered by the City) that scoops everything into the scoop of the loader and brings it to a nearby City dump truck. You lose everything all over again. A tent (their only form of shelter from the unforgiving elements), blankets, computers, phones, food, appointment information (for homes, sometimes the V.A. medical or recovery purposes), purses, medications, housing vouchers, knapsacks with any forms of identification they may have access to is gone with absolutely no prior notice. In order to replace these identifications you have to be able to show proof of who you are. The replacement process can sometimes take multiple months. Some simply cannot afford the price for an updated identification card or license. Identities can be stolen. Issuing a temporary card for voting wastes time, workforce, money and adds to the possibility of stolen identity.

Living outside is a hazardous and arduous journey. The stress of it all affects you both mentally and physically. It is further demeaning for someone who has already suffered the trauma of being discarded to exist outside. Denying a person their constitutional right to vote due to a circumstance they cannot necessarily control is wrong. Whether they are housed or unhoused, forcing a person to comply with providing only specific identifications limits voting access. This extra requirement could hamper voter access and overall turnout. Please vote against passage of LD34.

Thank you for this time.