



Department of the Secretary of State

Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

May 22, 2023

Testifying In Opposition to

L.D. 1959, "An Act Regarding Open Primary Elections and Ranked-choice Voting"

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Shenna Bellows and I am the Secretary of State and the chief elections officer. I am speaking today in opposition to L.D. 1959.

This bill is very similar to one that this committee heard in the 130st Legislature. The current bill, like the previous one, provides that for Governor, State Senator or State Rep, only the top two candidates will go to the general election ballot. This bill differs from the old bill in that the four people who received the most votes for U.S. Senator or Congress would go to the general election ballot.

Should the committee be interested in pursuing this new type of election system, often known as "jungle primaries," it is important to note the potential costs to make those changes, which include new ballot designs, mailing materials, technology and coding changes, public education efforts, and staffing to answer questions from candidates, municipal election officials, the press, and the public.

While a "jungle primary" or "top four" primary would not be completely incompatible with ranked choice voting, it certainly has the opposite impact of ranked choice voting in that it limits choice for voters in districts where one party or another predominates.

One place that the proposed legislation could save the State money is in changing the presidential primary to align with the primary election for other federal and state races. We could provide those figures to the committee ahead of the work session.

I would like to remind the committee the semi-open primary law which was enacted last session has an effective date of January 01, 2024, which we have been working diligently to make work with our Central Voter Registration (CVR) system. We would not be able to change course and implement this bill for 2024 without a significant cost and possible delays with rollout of the CVR system; therefore,

should the committee decide to move forward with this bill we would need to make sure the effective date of this bill is workable with current deadlines and demands.

For the above reasons, we oppose L.D. 1959. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.