

March 3, 2025

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 718 An Act to Require Municipal Clerks to Issue Absentee Ballots Only to Residents of That Municipality and to Eliminate Ongoing Absentee Voter Status

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 opposition to LD 718.

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.

This bill would eliminate the ability for Mainers to sign up to automatically receive absentee ballots on an ongoing basis. This would be a step backwards for Maine.

Legislation passed during the 130th Maine Legislature put into place the policy of ongoing absentee voter lists in Maine. As of November of 2023, a voter who was at least 65 years of age or who self-identified as having a disability was able to apply for status as an ongoing absentee voter. Each qualified applicant automatically received an absentee ballot for each ensuing statewide election, municipal election, and any other election for which the voter is entitled to vote and need not submit a separate request for each election. During the 131st Legislature, a bill was passed to expand the ongoing absentee status option to all Maine voters.

Eliminating this option for voters would be a mistake. Allowing voters to sign up to automatically receive absentee ballots is a way to increase efficiency, while maintaining security, in our elections system. It costs town clerks resources – time and money – to process absentee ballot requests. In addition, the majority of absentee voters in Maine choose that option in multiple elections. Data shows that 168,754 voters cast an absentee ballot in all 3 of the last even-year elections (2020, 2022 and 2024), creating duplicative work for town election officials. The

secure ongoing absentee voting process was designed to reduce this redundancy for town election officials.

Absentee voting is on the rise in Maine, with 2024 absentee ballot use surpassing 2022 numbers. In the 2024 General Election, approximately 45% of Maine voters utilized absentee ballots.. With the increased popularity of this voting option, we should be looking for ways to make it a smooth and efficient process for both voters and clerks.

Absentee voting is an important option for many groups who find it difficult to access polling places in person. Maintaining the option for voters to join an ongoing absentee voting list will ensure we continue to prioritize access to the ballot, especially for voters in rural areas, voters with disabilities, older voters, and those with inflexible work schedules, among and others who struggle to access polling places.

The practice of offering ongoing absentee voting lists is growing across the country. Seven states and the District of Columbia have on-going absentee mailing lists: Arizona, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Virginia. Maine has been a leader on this policy – we shouldn't retreat now.

For these reasons, we urge the committee to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 718.

David O'Brien
Policy Director
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