



Testimony in Opposition to LD 1977:
“An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Elections”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free-market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong opposition to LD 1977, a bill that undermines the integrity of our elections, expands the Secretary of State’s executive authority without appropriate checks, and reduces transparency for voters and the public.

While election modernization is an understandable pursuit, this bill introduces serious threats to good governance and constitutional norms. Among the most concerning is Section 7 (21-A MRSA §181, sub-§3), which grants the Secretary of State unilateral power to provisionally designate new state agencies as voter registration agencies, with no limitations on which agencies qualify and no immediate legislative oversight.

Let us be clear: this provision opens the floodgates for virtually any state agency, regardless of its core function, to be roped into a voter registration role. The only requirements under the bill are that the Secretary of State, with no external review, determines an agency to either provide public assistance or publicly funded disability programs. Practically any agency may be roped into voter registration under this broad and undefined authority, such as:

- The Maine Turnpike Authority, a transportation entity providing ADA infrastructure in its facilities, toll booths, and rest areas (possibly defined as a disability program).
- The Maine Dairy Promotion Board, due to its work with food pantries and nutritional programs, such as Milk2Me (possibly defined as public assistance).
- Or even the Maine Potato Board, because of its aid to struggling farmers through state-backed loans and workforce safety support (also possibly public assistance)

These are not entities equipped for secure, reliable voter registration, yet a politically motivated Secretary of State could commandeer these agencies for political purposes. This provision distorts the original intent of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which in part requires states to designate specific state and local offices, such as public assistance and disability offices, as voter registration agencies.

By sidestepping the Legislature through provisional appointments and only requiring the submission of draft legislation after the fact, LD 1977 centralizes too much power in



the executive branch. It is not difficult to imagine future administrations applying political calculations to these provisional designations, particularly in election years.

This is not hypothetical overreach; it is a green light to politicize the voter registration process in ways that Mainers across the political spectrum would and should oppose.

Additionally, the bill further erodes transparency by repealing the requirement for the Secretary of State to implement a system to collect and log public concerns about the conduct of elections. This is deeply troubling. When confidence in elections is already under strain, silencing public objections rather than addressing them only exacerbates distrust in the system.

Lastly, it enables municipalities to limit public access to observe absentee ballot inspections, potentially prioritizing party officials over concerned citizens. This contradicts Maine's long tradition of transparent, community-run elections and introduces the possibility of favoritism and exclusion.

Maine Policy Institute recommends that the Committee reject LD 1977 for the following reasons:

1. The bill creates a mechanism for the unchecked expansion of voter registration responsibilities to virtually any agency, with no meaningful standards, restrictions or oversight.
2. It weakens legislative oversight, requiring only post hoc reporting of provisional agency designations.
3. It repeals vital transparency measures that ensure election officials remain accountable to the public.
4. It restricts civic participation in observing absentee ballots, concentrating access in the hands of political insiders.

We urge this committee to defend election transparency, uphold checks and balances, and oppose any effort to broaden executive discretion without clear limitations. LD 1977 represents a dangerous precedent that must not be allowed to stand. Thank you for your time and consideration.