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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR MATTHEW POULIOT

Sponsor of LD 34

“An Act to Require a Person to Show Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting”

Public Hearing: February 6th

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am Senator Matt Pouliot and I represent Senate District 15, which includes the towns of Augusta, Belgrade, China, Mount Vernon, Sidney and Vassalboro. I am here to present my bill LD 34 “An Act to Require a Person to Show Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting.”

I thought it would be poignant to open with a statement from Freedom House:

“In a healthy democracy, all parties should compete to garner the broadest possible support from voters, and adhere to electoral rules that maximize both voter participation and administrative impartiality. We urge lawmakers across the country to reject any legislation that contradicts these principles. Civic activists and democracy movements around the world continue to look to the United States for inspiration and support, and it is essential that we set a positive example for those seeking to establish free and fair elections in their own countries.”

For those of you not familiar with Freedom House, they are a 501(c)3 organization focused on strengthening democracy around the world and I completely agree with their statement.

Some will say that this bill is an attempt to cause voter suppression. I can understand that point of view. The question, though, is who is being suppressed?

Many people when asked if there is fraud in Maine elections will say, “No”.

To be honest, I believe we are doing all we can to ensure a free and fair election and I suppose I would like very much to count myself in the “No” crowd. However, there are also many among

us who do not believe that there isn't any fraud. And whether we like it or not, perception is reality.

For those who believe there is no problem with election integrity, I would argue there is not fully a way for us to say all is being done to ensure there truly isn't.

Why you might ask? Well, in part, because we do not have a requirement for voter identification to vote in Maine after initial registration.

Public support for requiring identification to vote is consistently over 70%, yet we don't have a universal requirement on this mandate of a margin.

Why is that?

Well, frankly I think it has a lot to do with why we, collectively, think that voters are being suppressed.

In November 1980, polling¹ showed that the number of Americans who felt that the American system of voting is sound stood at a stellar 62%, with 6% of respondents saying it was sound with no changes and 56% saying sound with some improvements needed. Fast forward to 2022, and when asked, the responses showed an abysmal 36% overall confidence in the system of voting, with the same 6% saying it is essentially perfect and the other 30% saying - "yeah it's basically sound, but it could use some work"

So if only 6% of people think there is nothing to see here when it comes to our system of voting, why are we not agreeing to a change?

I think the answers vary - but largely have to do with who it is perceived would be losing the opportunity to vote. But when looking through that lens, we must also see those people who do not participate because they believe they have no agency, that their vote doesn't matter because they feel the system is rigged or stacked against their views.

If only 36% of the electorate believes that the system is basically sound, and further only 6% who needn't not be any changes, why wouldn't we take all measures to ensure integrity and restore faith in our system? Doing so would help increase the strength of democracy through more robust participation.

But maybe some want those who do not believe in the system as it works now to not to vote after all. That's a grimacing thought, but perhaps it should be considered that many voters do not feel their matters or that it will be lost and as such, they do not participate in the electoral process.

I'd like to think that is not truly the case, yet in the face of such staggering drops in public confidence, why would we not take it upon ourselves to provide confidence in the system? Whether some think that voter ID will move the needle or not, we also can not show that it will

¹ https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll_us_070722/

not help. If we do not have data that shows requiring an ID to vote would actually disenfranchise voters, why then would we not use it to help restore confidence in our system of democracy with more voters again?

Perhaps we can glean information on why this is so vehemently opposed from the ACLU, as published in the “Oppose Voter ID Legislation” section of their website²:

“Voter ID laws deprive many voters of their right to vote, reduce participation, and stand in direct opposition to our country’s trend of including more Americans in the democratic process. Many Americans do not have one of the forms of identification states acceptable for voting. These voters are disproportionately low-income, racial and ethnic minorities, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Such voters more frequently have difficulty obtaining ID, because they cannot afford or cannot obtain the underlying documents that are a prerequisite to obtaining government-issued photo ID cards.”

The absolute last thing I would want to do is deprive any legal voter from their right to vote. That is why I am proposing that Maine lead the way with issuing free ID cards to all Maine residents who need one. That would take away concerns that anyone who can not afford an ID or arrange for transportation or access to documents to would get one to make sure that the concern noted becomes a non-issue.

I should note that as drafted, state university or community college identification would not be accepted, however, I propose we amend the legislation to allow for those issued by the state of Maine university or community college system to be allowed, as long as the student is a Maine resident.

I hope that this committee will see this bill for what it is, which is an effort to restore faith and confidence in the system. Not all of you can be a part of the 6% who think the system is perfect the way it is, so if we can all agree improvements should be made, why not look at this as a sensible approach, supported by a broad array of the public, to improve the issue.

We should take all measures to restore trust, which hopefully, will increase participation and enthusiasm among the electorate. While we currently see high levels of voter participation in Maine, my concern is we will see a persistent erosion of this, following the trend of the lack of confidence in the system of voting from the early ‘80’s to now.

I will wrap up with another great article³ shared from Freedom House in which the author Nicole Bibbins Sedaca calls out the new “them” in a world that is increasingly becoming “us vs. them”, “The new “them” must be those who seek to weaken democratic institutions, sow distrust in our society, and question democratic values. They include hate-mongers, purveyors of violence and intimidation, and self-serving fabulists who attack the legitimacy of free and fair elections. Some of them may claim to share our policy views or deepest beliefs, but they clearly do not share our dedication to upholding democracy. We must recognize that their destructive behavior will

²<https://www.aclu.org/fact-sheet/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet>

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/americans-must-unite-defend-our-democracy>

eventually undermine the freedom of all Americans. They are the real threat to our nation and our future.

So let us unite in vigorously opposing those who are willing to undermine our system for personal or partisan gain, and in working to reverse the decline in our democracy. We must call on our newly elected leaders to govern in this spirit, and we must conduct ourselves accordingly as well.”

Please join me in supporting this common sense measure to help restore trust in our democratic process.

Thank you.