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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
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Testifying in favor

L.D. 332 "An Act to Provide Funds Necessary for the Production and Delivery of Election Materials by the Secretary of State and to Reestablish the Working Group to Study Polling Places at Schools"

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 support of L.D. 332.

I would like to thank the sponsor, Senator Hickman, for bringing forth this new language.

Sections one through three address the reoccurring challenges we see within elections regarding funding. Supply chain and staffing issues have increased the cost of materials for ballots, printing, postage, and other election costs and the delivery of such materials, which in turn has increased the cost of statewide elections dramatically since approximately 2021 - by about 25%. Establishing a fund to receive ongoing appropriations and allowing any remaining balances to be carried forward, will ensure predictability and stability when it comes to election material expenses incurred.

Section four of the bill relates to Chapter 73, as enacted by the Legislature in the Special Session, which established a working group to, among other duties, investigate the feasibility of using schools as voting places around the State of Maine. Due to the late adjournment of the Legislature in 2023, Chapter 73 did not go into effect until October 25, 2023, and therefore, the group was unable to convene until after that time. While the group has been working efficiently and diligently since the effective date of the resolve, it is clear more time is needed to thoroughly look into issues delegated to them by the Legislature.

Section four would allow the working group to continue to meet through the rest of this year. However, we recommend the committee consider changing the report back deadline to February 1, 2025 as the current deadline takes place the day after the November general election. Additionally, we would recommend this be passed as an emergency so that the working group may begin taking up their

work again as soon as possible rather than have to wait 90 days after the adjournment of the Legislature.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.