



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman
The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 3, 2025

RE: LD 158: An Act to Direct the Secretary of State to Establish a Date Each Year for Voting by Absentee Ballot

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Al Cleveland. I am here today as the Advocacy Director of the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League is in support of LD 158.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working for over 100 years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

Under current law there is already a date certain for voting by absentee ballot in state elections: §752 requires the Secretary of State to provide municipalities with absentee ballots no later than 30 days before an election; and §753-B requires town clerks to begin issuing absentee ballots "immediately" when they become available. So that seems clear: absentee balloting begins no later than 30 days before the election.

However, it's also true that some municipalities will have their ballots in advance of the 30-day deadline, and they are thus obligated by law to begin absentee balloting once they've received their ballots. So some towns get a head start. If the intent of this bill is to require those towns to withhold absentee ballots until the 30 day mark, we can see pros and cons: It may be in the best interest of both voters in those towns and individual clerks to start as soon as they are able. On the other hand, it does give some voters and some voting jurisdictions an advantage over others.

On balance, if the goal of this bill is to standardize the start date for absentee voting statewide, we support that. It's easier to communicate to voters. It's clearer to everyone what to expect. And it's fairer to voters no matter where they live.

However, we don't see any reason why that date should change from year to year. Why not just keep it at 30 days, rather than asking for the SOS to re-establish the date for each election?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.