



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 199: An Act to Change the Limits on Candidates' Communications with Voters at the Polls

Good afternoon 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 testifying in opposition to LD 199.

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.

Activities in and around the polling place can sometimes result in tension between important competing values. On the one hand, the polling place has a venerable tradition in Maine as a place where members of a community greet each other and speak about a wide range of matters on their mind, both political and non-political. On the other hand, many voters – quite reasonably – view the act of going to the polls as a private and personal matter during which they would prefer not to be approached by strangers or to engage in uninvited conversations.

Over the years, the Legislature and election officials have done a good job of balancing those interests, and our polling places remain an important “public forum” in which most people are reasonably comfortable. However, there are reports of voters who for various reasons have felt uncomfortable when voting. Some of them would like to see more emphasis on privacy and the right to pass in and out of the polls without being approached by anyone.

Our nonpartisan election observers have been present at polling places in each election since 2020. In 2024, we covered over 100 polling places across all 16 counties. One of the most common complaints we heard from voters on Election Day was that they felt distinctly uncomfortable being accosted by candidates on their way into the polling place – it can feel like running a gauntlet. It can feel intimidating to voters.

We believe that current law strikes a reasonable balance between First Amendment rights and voter intimidation. LD 199 would upset that balance. It would allow candidates in the polling place to declare their candidate status and party affiliation. This could lead to increased frustration from voters. Possibly creating a raucous and partisan atmosphere, it could disrupt the smooth conduct of the election. And it will be hard for election officials to enforce.

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