



Department of the Secretary of State

Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

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Testifying in favor

L.D. 53 “An Act to Establish the November General Election Day as a School Holiday”

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Shenna Bellows, I live in Manchester, and I am the Secretary of State and the chief elections officer in Maine. I am speaking today in support of L.D. 53.

We should all be very proud that Maine ranks consistently at the very top of the list in voter participation in the nation and that while other states have introduced and enacted laws that roll back voter rights, here in Maine, we have done the opposite. In fact, in the 2022 General Election, we had the highest rate of voter turnout of any state in the country. We’ll know this spring sometime if we were #1 again in November 2024. L.D. 53 is another bill that could expand voters’ access to the ballot box.

As amended, L.D. 53 would make General Elections, as defined in Title 21-A (that is, the regular election of state and county officials occurring biennially in November) a school holiday. Article II, section 4 of the Maine Constitution provides that the election of Senators and Representatives shall be on the Tuesday following the first Monday of November biennially forever and the election of Governor shall be on the Tuesday following the first Monday of November every four years. These General Elections are held in the even-numbered years.

This bill does *not* make Referendum Elections, Special Elections or Primary Elections school holidays.

Each election we do hear from voters who express concern they might not be able to vote as they are scheduled to work during the entire time the polls are open. Making General Election Days a school holiday could help some voters have time to go to the polls and make their voices heard. It may also help municipalities get more, and a wider variety of, poll workers, if more working-age Mainers have additional capacity to serve their communities in this way.

Additionally, many polling locations are also schools. There are many benefits to having polling locations co-located with schools: They are generally very accessible, have spacious gyms or

auditoriums that municipalities can use for a day, they are neutral, community-centric spaces, they often have good parking, and they provide an up-close look at our democracy in action for young future voters. The challenges posed by schools being co-located with polling places are all drawbacks posed by the inherent security, parking and logistics drawbacks of using a school as a school *and* a polling place on Election Day. Such concerns would be greatly alleviated by General Election Day being a school holiday.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.