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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. 129 "An Act to Amend the Law Governing Dedimus Justices"

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. I am speaking today in support of L.D. 129.

The Division of Corporations, UCC and Commissions is the record-keeping entity for commissions in Maine, including for Notaries Public, Marriage Officiants, and Dedimus Justices. Dedimus Justices perform a single function under Maine statute, that of swearing in various public officials. The office is currently a lifetime appointment by the Governor, but the application form is available from, and the paperwork managed by, the Notary Office within our Division.

Keeping an accurate account of who in Maine are Dedimus Justices and how to contact them is an important part of that work. Unfortunately, the law currently does not support that work as well as it should.

Given this reality, this summer, my office worked with Governor Mills' office on the proposal before you today. The goal was to make sure that Mainers who are Dedimus Justices still want to be in that role and have the responsibility, that we have current contact information for them, and to reduce the length of time that someone is appointed as a Dedimus Justice. I believe we have accomplished these simple goals, and I appreciate Senator Carney for introducing the legislation.

The first part of the bill establishes a seven-year term for Dedimus Justices, while also maintaining the lifetime appointment for those who have already been appointed. The seven-year term is in line with the length of a Notary Public commission.

Next the bill requires that a Dedimus Justice notify my office and the Governor's office of a change to their name, address, and other contact information. You can imagine the frustration that someone may have if they need a Dedimus Justice to swear in newly elected local officials and they can't get in

contact with someone locally because their information is not up to date in our system. By requiring this information to be updated within 30 days of a change, we can alleviate that headache.

Finally, the bill allows a Dedimus Justice to resign. Currently, some Dedimus Justices seek the appointment given their workplace responsibilities, but upon retirement would like to fully step away from that work. Right now, there just isn't a mechanism to allow that. While some may decide to let their seven-year appointment expire, others may want to step down earlier. Additionally, a resignation provision is important for the Dedimus Justices who are grandfathered in with a lifetime appointment, but may decide to step away, either when this bill becomes law, or sometime in the future.

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