



*Department of the Secretary of State*

*Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions*

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

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

*February 10, 2025*

Testifying against

L.D. 313 “Act to Improve Voter Confidence in Electronic Ballot Counting by Requiring Ballots to Contain Unique Identifiers”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Shenna Bellows, I live in Manchester, and I am the Secretary of State and chief elections officer. I am speaking today against L.D. 313.

Increasing voter confidence in Maine’s ballot tabulators is a laudable goal. This bill, however, would not have the desired effect and would harm voter confidence in Maine elections. Right now, Mainers do have confidence in our safe, secure and accurate elections, and we should not damage that.

L.D. 313 would eliminate ballot secrecy in the 332 municipalities which count ballots by tabulator by pre-assigning numbers to ballots and then posting that ballot information on municipal websites after the election. This takes away the fundamental democratic value of secret ballots. That is a recipe for conspiracy theories and voter intimidation, rather than an increase in voter confidence. It would undermine our democracy. It is on this point that I most strongly object to this proposal.

The threat of voter intimidation posed by elimination of the secret ballot is significant. For example, if a voter’s family member or other person is aware of someone’s numbered ballot, they could pressure the voter on how to vote, and be able to verify whether this person did in fact vote this way. Elimination of the secret ballot could also lead to vote buying schemes as evidenced by the historical record prior to adoption of the secret ballot. It is for these reasons that federal guidance from the Election Assistance Commission recommends against utilization of a pre-printed number on ballots.

Some states use detachable ballot stubs that are numbered, so the number does not remain on the voter’s voted ballot, but using ballot stubs adds much complexity to the printing process and does not fit with our current ballot layout and creation system. In states that use a ballot stub, the purpose is to

keep track of the number of ballots issued and they are not able to be used to tie a voter's ballot to how the ballot was cast and counted.

The current tabulators that we lease for the local level, ES&S DS200s, are not equipped with the technology required to imprint pre-assigned numbers and therefore cannot comply with the requirements of this bill. For auditing purposes, some systems imprint a random number on the ballot as it is scanned through the tabulator – which is not visible to the voter or anyone else - this allows a ballot comparison audit to be conducted whereby the physical ballot imprinted with the number can be compared to the electronic cast vote record which is saved under that unique number and can be retrieved from the software after the election. For budgetary purposes, the single unit retail price plus shipping for the next generation DS300 tabulator from ESS is \$6,375. If we had to replace our current tabulators with 1,000 new units at this retail cost would be over \$6 million. Of course, we can't just purchase equipment. We would have to create a Request for Proposals (RFP) and select the bidder who scores the highest number of points on the bid criteria, including the cost. This bid price per unit might be lower or higher than the retail price depending on whether maintenance or other items are included in the RFP.

I would encourage anyone who wants to increase voter confidence in the tabulators to attend a recount, or to watch our livestreams of the recounts. It is notable that of the 9 legislative recounts and the CD2 partial recount, every recount verified the accuracy of the tabulators. Late last year, knowing that we were conducting transparent and open processes at 45 Commerce Drive in Augusta, a gentleman from Mount Vernon came by to ask questions about the accuracy of tabulators. He had not been satisfied with the assurances of his local election officials, despite their best efforts to reassure him. Our then-Communications Director Emily Cook spoke with him about his concerns and invited him to come back during the recount of the House race from his area. He did and was extraordinarily pleased to be able to see that the full hand recount demonstrated identical results to those from the tabulator reported in Mount Vernon on Election Night. He was thrilled to be able to see that firsthand and even told her that he'd stop asking town officials about this.

We should trust voters with the truth and provide them with opportunities to engage in the elections process, rather than trying to impose ill-conceived notions on our already safe and secure elections.

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