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February 10, 2025

Testimony
In Support of

LD 349 An Act to Repeal the Laws that Allow Same-day Voter Registration

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and esteemed Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Representative Barbara Bagshaw from Windham, District 106 and am here today to present testimony in support of **LD 349 An Act to Repeal the Laws that Allow Same-day Voter Registration.**

I have personally witnessed firsthand the challenges posed by same-day voter registration. During recent elections, I have observed voter lines extending for over an hour, particularly during the last presidential election, when the lines wove around the back of the building. Many people, unable to wait due to work or other obligations, gave up and left without casting their votes. This speaks to the strain on both voters and election workers, which is only exacerbated by the administrative burden of same-day registration.

Poll staffing is already difficult, and adding the responsibility of same-day voter registration further compounds the challenges for election officials, poll workers, and volunteers. This is why I believe ending same-day voter registration is critical for ensuring efficient, accurate, and fair elections in Maine.

Same-day registration can lead to confusion and disorganization on Election Day and administrative chaos. As Sandwich, Massachusetts, town clerk Taylor White explained in 2017, deadlines exist to help election officials prepare accurate voter lists and conduct orderly elections. When voters show up to register and vote on the same day, it introduces logistical complications that can undermine this process. Without sufficient time to verify eligibility, maintain updated records, and address potential issues, election integrity and efficiency can be compromised.

Doug Ellis, an election administrator from Broadwater County, Montana, testified during a 2021 hearing that same-day registration places a significant burden on election officials. He described elections as one of the most challenging parts of his job, largely due to the difficulties of processing registrations and ensuring accurate vote counts simultaneously. The need to input voter information while managing high turnout can create delays, errors, and frustration for both officials and voters.

In Maine, we face similar challenges. Smaller communities and rural areas, in particular, often lack the resources and staffing necessary to handle the influx of same-day registrants, leading to delays, inaccuracies, and logistical strain.

Another concern is that same-day registration may encourage ill-informed voting. As Kevin Deitrich highlighted in a 2022 article for Nevada Policy, individuals who haven't registered ahead of time may be less informed about the issues on the ballot. Similarly, Matthew Gagnon, writing in the Bangor Daily News in 2011, noted that registering ahead of time is a sign that voters have put thought into their participation.

Gagnon argued that those who register at the last minute may be less engaged, which could result in impulsive or uninformed voting.

Additionally, when voters rush through the registration and voting process on the same day, it increases the likelihood of errors, provisional ballots, or challenges to their eligibility, creating further complications for election officials.

I recently had favorable communication with four town clerks from municipalities in Maine who support eliminating Election Day voter registration at the polls. They felt that, administratively, it would be a lot easier on them to manage and we discussed a potential compromise. The compromise would be ending voter registration on the Thursday before Election Day, which would also coincide with the close of early in-person voting.

With a few extra days, we could address many of the concerns surrounding same-day registration. Currently, 21 states allow some sort of lead time cut-off to Election Day. All of the other states have deadlines from 10 days up to 45 days prior, with the most popular being 30 days prior. They agreed that having it coincide with the last day to absentee vote, which is the Thursday before Election Day would simplify the process. Potentially, they would not have to hire and train as many registrars to work at the polls, and it would cut down on having an extra line in the hallway and reduce the number of duplicate registrations.

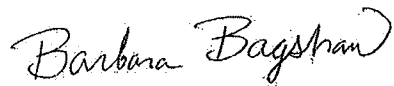
Again, this would alleviate the staffing strain by giving officials time to verify registrations and maintain accurate voter lists. Improve the flow of voters on Election Day, reduce wait times and ensure more people can successfully cast their ballots; ensuring a more efficient and accurate process, with fewer errors and challenges and reduce financial and resource burdens on election offices for smaller communities.

Another consideration is the inability to adequately verify eligibility which may undermine the accuracy of the voter rolls, potentially damaging public trust in the electoral process.

For the sake of Maine voters and our dedicated town clerks, I urge this committee to support LD 349 and repeal same-day voter registration. Our goal should be an electoral process that is efficient, accurate, and free from administrative chaos. Ending same-day registration will help achieve that goal, ensuring smoother operations on Election Day and better outcomes for all involved.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Bagshaw".

Barbara Bagshaw
State Representative