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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

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Testifying against

L.D. 718 "An Act to Require Municipal Clerks to Issue Absentee Ballots Only to Residents of That Municipality and to Eliminate Ongoing Absentee Voter Status"

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. I am speaking today against L.D. 718.

This bill would limit a voter's ability to designate an immediate family member or trusted person to deliver an absentee ballot to a person who is registered to vote in the same municipality as them. This would severely limit ballot access for older Mainers and Mainers with disabilities who rely on trusted family members, neighbors, and community members who do not happen to live within the same municipal boundaries that they do. Should a voter have to choose someone they don't know or trust to deliver their ballot to them, just because they have the same residence municipality listed on their voter registration? We think it is better to leave the law as is and allow voters to designate any immediate family member or person to deliver the voter's ballot.

Additionally, L.D. 718 would repeal ongoing absentee voting for Maine voters. Right now, Maine voters who are 65 years and older or who self-identify as having a disability may apply for ongoing absentee status – and many have. We have already started to hear from municipal clerks that ongoing absentee status is increasing voter turnout in local elections – a welcome result of this law. We should not go back on that.

Finally, this bill would remove the requirement that a voter be asked to provide their telephone number and email address, if available. This helps clerks contact a voter if their absentee ballot envelope is missing required items, like a signature, so that their ballot may be counted. The email and phone number are confidential and only used for ballot curing. We cannot think of a reason to want to remove this subsection from statute.

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