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Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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

March 25, 2025

Testifying against

L.D. 1008 “An Act to Require the Attorney General to Seek Legislative Approval Before Filing Any Civil Suit on Behalf of the State and to Authorize Citizen-initiated Petitions to Move for Dismissal”

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary, my name is Shenna Bellows, I live in Manchester, and I am the Secretary of State. I am testifying against L.D. 1008.

As a general matter, Maine’s Constitutional Officers – the Attorney General, the State Treasurer and the Secretary of State – are elected by the members of the Legislature to do the work assigned by the state constitution. These are not clerical positions which require signoff and micromanagement by the Legislature to conduct our work.

Specific to the Secretary of State’s work, L.D. 1008 establishes a new process by which a small group of Mainers could halt the Attorney General’s work by petition. The Secretary of State would need to design the petition before it would be circulated and validate the voters upon filing the completed petition with the Department. The number of signatures required (500) and length of time available for petitioners to collect signatures (one year) is not in line with other citizen-initiated petition processes in Maine currently, especially since applying for and filing a completed petition require legal action. Other petition processes simply put forward potential changes to rules or laws. For example, potential changes to laws through the citizen initiative process require voter signatures of at least 10% of the total votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election (currently 67,682) and petitions may be circulated for 18 months from issuance.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have at the work session.