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Testimony of Representative Sophie Warren in Support of
L.D. 944, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of
Maine to Improve Representation and Simplify Legislative Redistricting
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and respected colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Sophie Warren, and I represent House district 124, which includes coastal Scarborough.

At the request of the League of Women Voters of Maine – and, in particular, one of my constituents, from whom you’ll hear from in a moment – I am pleased to present L.D. 944, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Improve Representation and Simplify Legislative Redistricting.

First, I want to acknowledge that Maine has some of the strongest redistricting rules in the nation, with a bipartisan redistricting commission producing maps that must then be ratified by a vote of two thirds of each chamber and also approved by the Governor. Our rules have successfully prevented the sort of gerrymandered maps which have skewed legislative representation in some other states. Unfortunately, the relative size of the Maine House with respect to the Maine Senate has required the redistricting commission to produce maps which are inequitable in another way.

You see, under the current maps, approximately 60% of Mainers live in a house district that is completely contained within a Senate district. These individuals can develop a single network to engage both their Representative and their Senator. And candidates in these 91 House Districts can easily coordinate campaign activities with a single Senate candidate.

But with a 151-seat House and a 35-seat Senate, there is an average of 4.3 House districts per Senate district. This means that the boundaries can’t possibly line up, and there are slivers of people across the state who share a Representative with one set of their neighbors and a Senator with another. In fact, a full 40% of Mainers live in a house district that is split between two, three – or in a couple of cases – even four Senate districts, resulting in uneven citizen experiences in

coordinating interactions with their legislators. The smallest of these overlap zones has just 112 active voters.

As an example, most of the residents of my Scarborough district are in Sen. Brenner's Senate District 30, but those on the coastal edge of my district are in Sen. Carney's Senate District 29. Most of my constituents can work together to bring issues to the attention of both Sen. Brenner and myself, but a very few would need to address Sen. Carney instead. This pattern is repeated across the state – and also across this committee, with Representatives Greenwood, Salisbury and Adams each serving districts that are split between two Senate Districts, while the remaining six Representatives serve a district which is fully contained within a single Senate District.

From the Senate side, we find districts that contain voters from an average of six different House Districts. But Senator Martin is one of only two serving a district that overlaps with nine different house districts - only one of which is wholly contained within his Senate District. This contrasts with Senate District 21 in Lewiston, which contains exactly four whole House Districts and for several redistricting cycles has been the only example of a nested district in the State of Maine. Lewiston has had a state legislative delegation, but none of the rest of us do.

Fortunately, we can make the situation significantly more equitable with just a dozen words, simply giving the next redistricting commission a little more flexibility on the House side – flexibility that they already have on the Senate side. While recent redistricting commissions have brought forward 35-district Senate maps, the constitution permits the redistricting commission to prepare a Senate map with 31, 33, or 35 districts. The resulting maps must then be approved by a 2/3 vote in both the Senate and the House, leaving the final decision on the number of Senate districts in the hands of the Legislature.

This amendment would permit future redistricting commissions to prepare a House map with 151, 153 or 155 districts. And a 155-seat House coupled with a 31-seat senate allows for nested legislative districts, with five House Districts fully contained within each Senate District. Such a map would essentially shift four seats from the Senate to the House, with no net change in the size of the legislature. Senate districts would be about 10% larger, but in exchange, House districts would be a bit smaller.

Now, before anybody starts to worry about the effect this proposal might have on their own district, I'll remind you that the next census is still five years out, and that the next set of maps won't be used until 2032. Details of these next maps will be at least as affected by shifts in population as they would be by a transition to nested districts. And. All of us will have termed out by then. Ours is the legislature that can consider this proposal on its merits, rather than with an eye to how it might affect our own reelection.

You'll notice that there is nothing in this amendment to require the redistricting commission to draw nested districts, and this is intentional. The League of Women Voters and I believe that this change will make the redistricting commission's task easier, but we recognize that they will always need to weigh a variety of considerations, with particular attention to partisan fairness. A requirement to nest districts may have unintended consequences, and we do not want to tie their hands. That said, the League of Women Voters has an exceptionally long institutional memory, and if this amendment passes the legislature and then the citizenry, the League can be counted on to join those of us in the current legislature in ensuring that the next redistricting commission understands that that this modification to the constitution is intended to allow for nested districts.

I am excited by the potential to develop a delegation model of state governance. House and Senate candidates could more easily coordinate campaign activities. Representatives and Senators could more easily coordinate constituent meetings on issues relevant to their region. These opportunities for coordination can perhaps strengthen the lines of communication between the House and Senate, making our Legislative activities more efficient and productive.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.