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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

April 16, 2025

Testifying in opposition to

L.D. 1422 "An Act Regarding Open Primary Elections and Ranked-choice Voting"

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 testifying in opposition to L.D. 1422.

This bill is very similar to one that this committee heard in the 131st Legislature. The current bill, like L.D. 1959 from 2023, provides that for Governor, State Senator or State Representative, only the top two candidates from the open Primary Election would go to the General Election ballot. And the four candidates who received the most votes for U.S. Senator or Congress would go to the General Election ballot.

Unlike the bill from the previous legislature, L.D. 1422 also removes presidential primaries and general elections for presidential electors as ranked choice voting elections. It also moves the date of presidential primaries from the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March to the second Tuesday in June. While there may be cost savings to having the presidential primaries coincide with legislative primaries every four years, had this provision been in place in 2024, Maine's presidential primaries would have been the last one conducted in the country. The District of Columbia, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico and South Dakota held primaries on June 4 and Guam and the Virgin Islands held caucuses on June 8 last year, and Maine's state-level primary was on June 11, 2024.

Should the committee be interested in pursuing this new type of election system, often known as "jungle primaries," it is important to note the potential costs to make those changes, which include new ballot designs, mailing materials, technology and coding changes, public education efforts, and staffing to answer questions from candidates, municipal election officials, the press, and the public.

While a "jungle primary" or "top four" primary would not be completely incompatible with ranked choice voting, it certainly has the opposite impact of ranked choice voting in that could limit choice in the General Election for voters in districts where one party or another predominates.

Given the current workload in the Elections Division with the rollout of the new Central Voter Registration system later this year and subsequent required trainings for municipal clerks and registrars ahead of a big election year in 2026, should the committee choose to move forward with this bill, we would request that the implementation date be pushed out to October 1, 2027 (just ahead of the beginning of the work of the 2028 presidential election cycle).

For the above reasons, we oppose L.D. 1422. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.