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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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**Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs on  
LD 1527, An Act to Require Postage Prepaid Envelopes Be Provided for the  
Return of Absentee Ballots**

**April 16, 2025**

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to sponsor of LD 1527, "An Act to Require Postage Prepaid Envelopes Be Provided for the Return of Absentee Ballots."

LD 1527 proposes to require the Secretary of State to provide each municipality with a reasonable number of absentee ballots as well as postage prepaid return envelopes. This is a policy that would promote equal access to voting and encourage civic engagement.

Requiring voters to pay for postage—even a small amount—introduces a barrier to participation, especially for low-income voters, seniors on fixed incomes, students, and people in rural areas without easy access to postal services. Participating in democracy shouldn't cost money at the point of access.

The Twenty-Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was ratified in 1964, made it illegal for governments to impose taxes on voters during federal elections. Furthermore, doing so at other levels of government is simply wrong. Requiring absentee voters, voters who may be old and frail or live in very remote parts of the state, to pay postage on their ballots is similar to a poll tax.

I decided to sponsor this bill after speaking with a college student from my district. She is attending school in Boston but still views western Maine as her home. She remains on Maine's voter rolls and has not registered to vote in Boston. While she spends most of her time in Maine, she is not here during elections in November so has to vote absentee.

She is very politically engaged but was discouraged that she had to purchase stamps in order to vote absentee. If she finds this to be a nuisance, there is no doubt that people less engaged in politics will be even more discouraged and may refrain from mailing in absentee ballots due to the inconvenience.

Studies have shown that even small obstacles—like finding stamps—can disproportionately affect turnout, especially among young voters and marginalized groups. A prepaid envelope removes this friction and helps ensure no one is discouraged from voting due to logistical or financial hurdles.

Indeed, postage costs money and the state doesn't have a lot of extra lying around right now. But any fiscal note associated with this bill should be considered an investment in democracy. Covering the cost of postage is a small price to pay to strengthen voter participation and trust in elections. Maine already covers many election-related costs; prepaid postage is just another way to support a robust, accessible democracy.

According to NCSL, nineteen states and Washington, D.C. require election officials to provide return postage for mailed ballots. These states include:

- Arizona
- California
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Nevada
- New Mexico
- Oregon
- Rhode Island
- Virginia
- Washington
- West Virginia
- Wisconsin

A brief glance at the list will show you there are red, blue, and purple states that have this policy and they are spread across the country. The one clear similarity between all is a dedication to provide fair and equal access to elections.

Thank you for your time today. I would happy to answer any questions and I encourage you to support LD 1527.