

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. My name is Betsy Williams, I live in Brunswick and I am speaking in opposition to LD 1149, which, under the guise of fixing a non-existent voter security problem will roll back recent progress in addressing very real voting access problems.

As a member of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, I always look at public policy through the lens of the values and principles of my faith. I know I'm not alone in this practice—in fact, I believe most people apply their values and principles to public policy whether they consider them in the context of their religion or not. Principles and values guide our everyday lives, and their importance is elevated in the process of making policy decisions that directly impact others' lives and the future of our societal institutions.

LD 1149 highlights a principle that I'm sure every American citizen in this room cares about deeply and that is, of course, the right to vote. If we all agree that the right to vote is foundational to our democracy, let's consider what problems currently exist that threaten this principle here in Maine.

1. Voter fraud. Do we have a problem with people voting illegally? Giving a false address at the polls, showing a fake ID when they register, voting in multiple voting places? No, not according to The Commission to Study the Conduct of Elections in Maine, who reported in 2013 that there is "little or no history in Maine of voter impersonation or identification fraud."
2. Voter intimidation. Do we have a problem with candidates or organizations intimidating voters with inappropriate signage or verbal assault at the polls? No.
3. Do we have inadequately trained town clerks and poll workers who do not perform due diligence when signing people in to vote? No.

So what current problems *do* exist in Maine that threaten the right to vote principle? In my opinion there is only one, but it has multiple components: voter access.

1. Not every Mainer lives within easy access to polling places or has transportation to their polling place.
2. Not every Mainer is healthy enough, or physically able to get themselves to a polling place.
3. Not every Mainer is present in the state on voting day.

Now let's look at LD 1149 and how it does or doesn't address these *real* problems.

1. LD 1149's photo ID requirement: since we have no reported problem with voter fraud, showing a photo ID at the polls is unnecessary. In fact, such a requirement would likely *add* to the problem of access, since provisions in the bill for obtaining a photo ID for those currently without one presents a bureaucratic hurdle for the very same voters I just mentioned who are already challenged to get to the polls..
2. LD 1149's rollback of absentee voting laws. News reports in 2024 cited that one in four Mainers requested absentee ballots that year. That's over 270,000 people.* Although it's impossible to know why a quarter of Maine voters chose this option, it's safe to say that reversing recent the laws improving this option would likely inhibit overall voter turnout.

So, in my opinion, LD 1149 makes all the current challenges to the right to vote worse, not better. It potentially *decreases* the number of people who vote when public policies should be focused on doing everything possible to *increase* that number.

LD 1149 deserves to be on the ballot in November so all citizen's voices can be heard. I urge you to uphold this treasured American principle and vote ONTP on LD 1149.

Thank you.

*Portland Press Herald, February 13, 2013, "by a 4-1 vote, The Commission to Study the Conduct of Elections in Maine said in a report that there is "little or no history in Maine of voter impersonation or identification fraud."

*Maine Public Radio, October 22, 2024, Bangor Daily News, October, 30, 2024