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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY**

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

*January 22, 2026*

Testifying neither for nor against

L.D. 517 “An Act Regarding Synthetic Material in Campaign Advertising”

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary, my name is Shenna Bellows and I am the Secretary of State. I am providing testimony neither for nor against L.D. 517.

One frustration that we hear over and over from voters, especially as campaign advertising periods pick up, is an inability to tell what is true and what isn't. The increased availability of artificial intelligence to create realistic-seeming photos and videos quickly and cheaply will only supercharge these fears.

We're already seeing this happen. Two days before New Hampshire's 2024 presidential primary, a robocall went out to thousands of voters. The message featured an AI-generated voice similar to then-President and candidate Joe Biden and falsely suggested that voting in the primary would preclude voters from voting in the November General Election.

Election misinformation has already been a problem. With the increased accessibility of AI tools to campaigns or rogue actors, we see the problem only continuing to grow potentially explosively over time. As a public figure, I've already experienced my image being altered substantially through AI tools to dehumanize and misrepresent me.

As the provisions of the sponsor's amendment to L.D. 517 impact the Maine Ethics Commission rather than the Department of the Secretary of State and the Elections Division, we are neither for nor against the bill itself. As an issue that needs addressing, however, we are glad to see the Maine Legislature will be considering the right way of taking on this problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.