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To: Senator Joseph Baldacci, Senate Chair
Representative Ann Higgins Matlack, House Chair
Members of Committee on State and Local Government
From: Angela Holmes, Asst. City Administrator/City Clerk for the City of Westbrook
Date: April 7, 2021
Re: LD 805 – An Act to Allow Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms at Voting Places

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

I am writing to express my **support** of LD 805, *An Act to Allow Municipalities to Prohibit Firearms at Voting Places*. I have served as the Municipal Clerk and Registrar of Voters for the City of Westbrook for six years and wish to provide feedback on the practical implications of this legislation. While there will likely be testimony on this topic relating to voter concerns, I wish to present the concerns expressed by my election workers relating to the presence of firearms at the polls.

Under Maine's laws, a person may enter a voting place carrying a firearm, with some exceptions, such as when the polling place is located at a school. For many municipalities, voting places are located on school campuses, in which case this proposed legislation would not apply. However, for many other municipalities, the presence of firearms is a reality that must be navigated on top of administering an election. In Westbrook, we do have residents who avail themselves of this opportunity to carry firearms at the polls. To be clear, we have never had any issue with these voters in terms of threatening behavior. However, the presence of firearms, particularly in light in the national civil unrest experienced around the November 3, 2020 election, has proven to be a major point of concern for many election workers. While the mere presence of a firearm may not legally constitute intimidation, my experience from running elections in Westbrook leads me to believe that practically speaking, it may.

Election workers occupy a public role and are more likely to be subject to problematic behavior at the polls than the average voter may encounter. When people are angry, upset, or suspicious of the security of election administration, they are far more likely to direct their attentions to election workers than to other voters. Prior to each election, I hold training sessions for my workers, and include a segment on de-escalation to assist if and when workers encounter agitated voters. Every session, without fail, I am presented with questions about maintaining personal safety in light of the presence of firearms. The standard response is that if there is ever a concern for one's safety or the safety of others, to call 911. As this is the only recourse available to election workers, several have

declined to serve. In addition, at one of our most recent training sessions, the question was presented as to whether election workers themselves may carry firearms while working at the polls. In Westbrook, election workers are considered employees and fall subject to a policy which prohibits the carrying of firearms while at work, unless they are a law enforcement officer. However, the fact that this question has been raised gives me cause for concern as other municipalities may interpret this differently.

It is important to note that alternative voting methods do exist if a voter does not wish to or cannot go to a polling location on Election Day. We have witnessed the ever-increasing popularity of absentee voting, whether at a Town Hall or by mail, as an alternative to going to the polls. However, I firmly believe that voters should have a right to participate in whatever method they prefer without concern about personal safety influencing the decision. To that end, offering an alternative to the voter who does not wish to go to the polling location due to heightened concerns about personal safety does nothing for the election worker who must still staff the election.

For those communities that have their polling locations at schools, the prohibition of firearms on school campuses makes this legislation unnecessary. However, for the many municipalities that do not have polling locations at schools, the presence of firearms is a reality that we must face. Just as we have protected students, this legislation would offer protection to both voters and election workers on election day – for the voters while they exercise their right, and for the election workers serving them. I believe that LD 805 takes a step in the right direction by allowing municipalities the option of extending this protection to their citizens, election workers and voters alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this item. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 207-591-8115 or by email at aholmes@westbrook.me.us.