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*Testimony of Rep. Allison Hepler presenting
LD 1274, An Act Regarding 2021 Municipal Elections and Town Meetings
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Allison Hepler and I proudly represent the towns of Arrowsic, Dresden, Georgetown, Phippsburg, part of Richmond and my own town of Woolwich. I am here today to present **LD 1274, An Act Regarding 2021 Municipal Elections and Town Meetings**.

I'm grateful to Maine Municipal Association for its help in drafting this bill.

As a Woolwich selectperson, I understand firsthand the impact of COVID-19 on our municipalities. Like many towns with a Town Meeting form of government, our ability to keep things running was immediately and dramatically affected by the restrictions on public gatherings. How could we run our municipal elections? If we could not hold a Town Meeting before the end of our fiscal year, which is where the townspeople determine our budget, would we be able to pay our bills? Since Woolwich is a Town that has not accepted secret ballot voting on its Warrant, could we hold our Town Meeting using this method? How could we hold a public meeting, which is required prior to a vote on an ordinance change?

Thanks to legislation that the 129th Legislature passed on the day we adjourned on March 17, 2020, we were able to continue operating using a variety of methods. That law expired on January 15, 2021. Speaking for myself, I was 100% convinced that all of this would be over, but clearly that is not the case. This bill basically does four things: (1) provides municipalities the same accommodations regarding municipal elections and Town Meetings that we were afforded this past year; (2) is retroactive to January 15, 2021; (3) expires on January 15, 2022; and (4) because of the pandemic, has an emergency resolve in order to enact upon passage.

For all of the towns I represent, last year was tricky to navigate, but each one adapted swiftly, creatively, and equitably to meet the challenges. The ability to continue to respond to residents as needed is crucial this year.

Thanks for your time today. I'm happy to answer any questions.