



TO: The Honorable Tim Nangle
The Honorable Holly Stover, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: March 2, 2023

RE: LD 577 - An Act to Increase Availability of Election Information on Local Government Websites

Good afternoon Senator Nangle and Representative Stover.

My name is Lane Sturtevant. I'm a resident of Warren. I am the statewide organizer for the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in support of LD 577, An Act to Increase Availability of Election Information on Local Government Websites.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working for over 100 years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

As part of our work in the public interest, the League works with Mainers all over the state, helping them engage in self-governance at all levels: local, state, and federal. Some of the most immediate and impactful civic engagement can be at the local level, where decisions are made that affect our roads, our schools, our businesses, and our homes. Helping Mainers connect to their local government is part of the League's work in the public interest. In recent years, we have heard from Mainers about the difficulties of readily finding information about local government, including local election information.

Last year, the League set a goal of covering all elections in Maine – state, federal and local – in our online voter guide, Vote411.org. In the process of covering local elections, our volunteer researchers realized that many municipalities in Maine do not post important local election information, like municipal ballot questions or the names of candidates for local office, anywhere online. In some cases, this is because the municipality does not have an official website; by our estimate, at least 86 municipalities in Maine do not have an official website, though that figure could be higher. In other cases, municipalities have official websites, but they don't routinely post upcoming local election information. If a voter in that municipality wanted to know what was on their local ballot, they would have to call the town clerk or visit the town office to see the sample ballot. These interactions not only disrupt the busy election work of the clerk, but also require that the voter is free during the hours the town clerk is working or the town office is open. Many Mainers work or provide child or elder care during those times.

The information that we would like to see provided online is information that town clerks already compile. This readily available information would include, whenever applicable: the day, date and title of

the election, the voting district designation, if any, the names and location of voting place or places, opening and closing times of the polls, and a specimen ballot or list of the offices and referendum questions for that election. While these pieces of information are not specifically outlined in the amendment brought forward today, we would encourage the committee to consider adding them.

Two decades into the 21st century, we are living in a world where smartphones, search engines, and social media have made the internet the default information tool for most Mainers.¹ Voters expect that election information will be available online, and they might not know to seek that information out in person or over the phone. Local elections in Maine see much lower turnout rates than state or federal elections, and one significant reason could be this lack of easily accessible information about what is on the ballot, as well as when the local election is happening, and where.

We understand that municipalities, especially smaller towns, do not always have the resources to maintain an up-to-date official website where clerks can easily post local election information. That is why we support having the Secretary of State's office provide a way for municipalities to submit local election information to be centrally posted through the Secretary of State's website. Such an option would be a significant public service; it would solve the problem for voters without overburdening town clerks.

We are grateful to the sponsor, the clerks, and the Secretary of State for their encouragement in bringing this bill forward. We support the amendment presented by the sponsor. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

¹ This recently published Democracy Playbook from the NewDEAL Forum makes a similar recommendation about providing more readily available election information.
<https://newdealforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Democracy-Playbook-Final.pdf>