



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini
The Honorable John Schneck, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: March 8, 2021

RE: LD 580 "RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Regarding Early Voting"

Good morning Senator Luchini and Representative Caiazzo, members of the committee.

My name is Nadine Bangerter. I'm a resident of Rockland. I am here today as a volunteer for the League of Women Voters of Maine, testifying in support of LD 580 "RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Regarding Early Voting."

The League of Women Voters of Maine, a nonpartisan political organization, supports measures that improve voter access to the ballot and provide for smooth, efficient, and secure elections. Here in Maine we have enjoyed a long history of professional, nonpartisan, voter-friendly administration of elections. Our town and city clerks are among the most recognized and trusted government officials in our communities.

The League of Women Voters also supports providing options for voters to exercise the franchise, including early in-person voting, Election Day in-person voting, and absentee voting. A robust, secure, accessible election system makes both in-person and absentee voting convenient. At the same time, these choices should be executed in the most efficient means possible for Maine's municipal clerks, who face increases in labor-intensive options. The constitutional amendment proposed in LD 580 is an effective process for early voting that advances these dual goals. In the Maine Secretary of State's "Report on the November 2009 Pilot Program for Early Voting," the executive summary noted:

Early Voting was again shown to provide convenience and ease of access to voters, while at the same time alleviating some of the demands on municipal election officials as they contend with processing increasing numbers of absentee ballots.¹

¹ Report on the November 2009 Pilot Program for Early Voting, January 15, 2010, <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/voter-info/2009earlyvotingreport.pdf>

In addition, early in-person voting provides similar benefits to voters as absentee ballots. The Brennan Center for Justice summarized the benefits succinctly:

As Americans' lives become more complex, confining voting to a single 8- or 12-hour period is simply not reflective of how most voters live. Expanding early voting programs is a crucial way to modernize the system. It adds important flexibility and convenience, reduces the administrative burdens of the Election Day rush, keeps elections safe and secure...²

Voting in-person, in advance of Election Day, is well established in Maine. A significant number of Maine voters have cast early in-person ballots since the first pilot program in 2005. In the 2016 Presidential election, 109,700 Maine voters (14.3%) cast early in-person ballots; in the 2018 general election, 65,300 Mainers (10.2%) voted early; and in the 2020 Presidential election, more than one-out-of-every-six, or 147,100 Maine voters (17.4%) opted to vote early in person.³

Currently, Maine utilizes absentee ballots to process early in-person voting. Voters can go to their town clerks and request to vote in front of the clerk using an absentee ballot. Though these ballots are neither mailed nor require an application, the ballots still need to be signed, sealed, and secured for later processing like absentee ballots. Later processing of these ballots occurs during the most demanding and critical time for clerks during an election. But this is not true early in-person voting. True early voting would allow voters to cast their ballots before Election Day in the same manner as on Election Day. Instead of later processing, voters will insert their ballot into the voting machine or ballot box, but no votes will be tallied until Election Day. While offering more convenience for voters, true early voting would eliminate multiple steps for election officials.

The League believes that true early voting offers a more secure, efficient, orderly process for the conduct of elections and an important convenience for voters. Ideally, we would like to see the early voting period cover at least one weekend before the election.

We thank the sponsors for bringing this Resolution forward. Thank you for your consideration.

² Early Voting: What Works, Brennan Center for Justice, October 31, 2013, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/early-voting-what-works>

³ Julie L. Flynn, Deputy Secretary of State's testimony for LD 753, February 25, 2019, <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=94563>. 2020 information from Secretary of State's November 2020 election absentee data.