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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

**LD 208 “An Act To Expand Access to Absentee Ballots”**

*March 8, 2021*

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, I am Secretary of State Shenna Bellows and providing testimony neither for nor against LD 208. I wish to express my deep appreciation to the bill sponsor for bringing this conversation forward. Absentee voting and in-person absentee voting are vital components of our high rates of voter participation. Indeed, 62% of Maine voters in November 2020 voted absentee. I appreciate the intent behind this bill.

While one of my main goals as Secretary of State is increasing voting participation and eliminating barriers to access, allowing in-person absentee voting on Election Day would be detrimental to conducting an election. In many municipalities, in-person absentee voting happens in the town office, and the polling place for Election Day is in a different location. It doesn't make sense that a town clerk would have to leave the town's polling place – where they're leading a team of staff and volunteers who are conducting the election for everyone in the town – to assist one person in voting who could have simply gone to the polling place instead. Additionally, we have heard from clerks that the Monday prior to Election Day is critical for set up for Election Day itself.

Additionally, we believe that the current deadline for request of a mailed absentee ballot, which is the Thursday before Election Day at 5 p.m., is the latest reasonable time for a request to be made, the ballot to be delivered and the ballot to be returned. Given postal service delays in 2020, we have concerns about disenfranchising voters should the deadline be moved. For example, were the clerk be required to mail out a ballot when the request is made up to 5 p.m. on the day before an election, it is possible the ballot would not be able to be collected by the postal service until Election Day and would take an additional day or more for delivery to the voter, so there would be no chance they would receive it in time to have their vote counted. Someone could, at 4:45 p.m. on Monday, request a ballot be mailed to them and refrain from going to the polls on Tuesday thinking it might all work out or out of misguided fear that they won't be able to vote in person once they've ordered an absentee ballot, and miss the opportunity to vote.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I am happy to answer any questions.