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Representative Heidi Brooks, House District 61-Part of Lewiston

Testimony in Support of LD 208  
An Act To Expand Access to Absentee Ballots

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
Monday, March 8, 2021

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. My name is Heidi Brooks and I represent House District 61, Part of Lewiston. I am here today to present LD 208, An Act To Expand Access to Absentee Ballots.

Around ten years ago the Legislature and former Governor passed a measure that would eliminate same-day voter registration and took away no-excuse absentee voting on the Friday, weekend and Monday before the election. Voters would need to have one of a limited set of circumstances to request an absentee ballot during this period. There was a successful people's veto petition drive and vote to restore same day voter registration; however, this didn't include restoring no-excuse absentee voting for the Friday, weekend and Monday before the election.

This bill would restore no-excuse absentee voting until 8:00 pm on election day. It would also allow for ballots to be returned by 3rd persons until the close of the polls on election day. I introduced similar legislation during my first term in the 127th legislature. The Maine Town and City Clerks Association were predominantly not in favor of the legislation and their testimony noted the following:

"In the last presidential election before the 2011 law change, many towns issued a record setting number of absentee ballots on the day before election and several towns issued several hundred in-person absentee ballots that day. In Caribou in the 2008 presidential election, 11.5% of the total absentee ballots cast were done the day before the election in person at the town of office. In that same election, Lewiston issued 600 in person absentee ballots on the day before the election."

In 2020 the Governor issued an Executive Order to allow no-excuse absentee voting on the Friday before the election. With COVID-19 absentee voting and early voting helped our polling locations remain less crowded on election day. Our city clerk indicated that 522 voters cast a ballot on that Friday.

Although in both cases the large turnout of voters on those days is meant to stress their opposition to the bill, it points out how many voters utilized those days to cast their ballot.

Election Day is not a holiday. I support this measure that is intended to help voters to exercise their right to participate in our democracy. I understand that there will be opposition to this measure as clerks process ballots and prepare for the elections during this time. I would support a compromise that would allow voters to vote using the no-excuse absentee ballot through the Friday before the election.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this measure.