



**Angela Holmes**  
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To: Senator Louis J. Luchini, Senate Chair  
Representative Chris Caiazzo, House Chair  
Members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee

From: Angela Holmes, Asst. City Administrator/City Clerk for the City of Westbrook

Date: March 5, 2021

Re: LD 208 – An Act to Expand Access to Absentee Ballots

Position: Opposed

To Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee,

I am writing to express my **opposition** to LD 208. I have served as the Municipal Clerk and Registrar of Voters for the City of Westbrook for six years and wish to provide feedback on the practical implications of this legislation. There are three main components to this legislation, and my comments on each item are included below.

**Item 1 – Eliminating restriction on issuance of absentee ballots after 3<sup>rd</sup> day before an election**

I am not in favor of this change. Generally speaking, elections fall on Tuesdays, making the 3<sup>rd</sup> business day prior to an election a Thursday. This provides two business days (Friday and Monday) during which absentee ballots may only be issued if the voter qualifies under the special circumstance provisions (they will be unexpectedly absent from the municipality during the entire time the polls are open on Election Day, they have a physical disability, they are unable to travel to the polls if the voter is a resident of a coastal island ward or precinct, or they have an incapacity or illness that has resulted in the voter's inability to leave home or a treatment facility). These two business days are critically important in allowing municipal clerks the room to reconcile and verify data before Election Day, and the continued operation of regular absentee voting on those two days significantly complicates that process. A major part of the election administration process is the reconciliation of data – we pride ourselves on the high level of transparency and accuracy we have in running elections in the State of Maine. Eliminating the opportunity to have two business days before an election to conduct final reconciliations without the additional complication of widespread absentee voting jeopardizes this high standard. Given that we have an exemption option currently in place that addresses the needs of

voters who absolutely need to vote absentee on that Friday or Monday, I am not in favor of amending this portion of the law.

**Item 2 – Remove deadline for return of absentee ballots by 3<sup>rd</sup> person**

I am in favor of this amendment, but as it is presented in a single bill with other amendments, I must oppose this. However, if this amendment were to appear separately, I would support it.

This law allows a voter to authorize an unrelated third-party person to obtain a ballot on their behalf, bring it to the voter, allow them to vote, and return it to Town Hall. I believe that the intent of the restriction which requires the third-party person to return the ballot to the municipal clerk within two days was for security reasons when a ballot is issued to someone other than the voter. However, more people than ever are voting absentee now. I believe that history will mark the COVID-19 pandemic as the changing point in voter behavior, and that we'll continue to see more people choosing to vote absentee in the future. Our voters are well-educated, informed and pay attention to the security of election administration. I believe that concerns about third-party persons not handling the return of a ballot within a two-day deadline are outweighed by the need to provide people with as many options as possible when voting absentee. While it may have been likely in the past for a voter to allow an unknown third-party person (such as a campaign worker) to obtain, deliver and return a ballot on their behalf, the more realistic circumstance is that a voter will designate a trusted person, such as a friend, care worker or neighbor.

**Item 3. Allows a voter to vote by absentee ballot in the presence of the clerk until 8pm on the day of any election.**

The intent of this amendment is somewhat unclear, but I believe my comments on Item 1 provide insight that is applicable to this item as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this item. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at 207-591-8115 or by email at [aholmes@westbrook.me.us](mailto:aholmes@westbrook.me.us).