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Committees on Veterans and Legal Affairs
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 208 – An Act to Expand Access to Absentee Ballots – **OPPOSE**

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and distinguished members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee:

Many of you may already know me from testimony over time; as the Fairfield Municipal Clerk & Welfare Director. Today I respectfully request your consideration of the unintended consequences and full implications for which this proposed legislation entails.

I am writing in opposition to LD208 due to the tremendous burden this prospective law would place on Municipal Clerks and municipalities. There are several deficiencies and conflicts with the proposed legislation that would interfere with the legal compliance and administration of elections.

The election process, which is entirely overseen by the Municipal Clerk, is a labor-intensive and time-consuming effort that we proudly undertake. It is important to note that during elections, the regular responsibilities and obligations of our public offices remain when considering additional workload and budget increases. Election and Municipal Clerk duties are specialized, detailed and require precision for compliance with law. Municipalities face challenges recruiting temporary qualified and trained staff that are able and available to supplement the incredible addition of duties to our already overflowing workload during the time period before, during and post-election. Clerks are often breaching labor law compliance to navigate elections – this proposal would lend to further sleep deprivation, and impact safety for their commute, not to mention the level of detail that could be impacted when Clerks become expected to perform humanly impossible tasks. Is it fair to ask Clerks to experience unhealthy exhaustion and compromise their wellbeing? Access to ballots is not an issue with all the other provisions in place for voters.

It is important to consider the full logistics of setting up an Election. The Municipal Clerk often must be outside the office in the days prior to the Election to prepare the Election location, test equipment, train personnel and facilitate Early Processing. The office may be open and with the Clerk relying on other staff to cover any time-sensitive needs and returning to substantial follow-up. We must ensure compliance regarding setting up booths, ropes, signage, spacing, sanitization, accessible voting, equipment, distance measurements for political signage, machines that have to be secure at all times with their coded electronic devices, charging their back-up battery packs, voter registrar material/table, warden/clerks binders & checklists, internet/laptop functioning, etc.

Immediately after the election, Municipal Clerks have a tremendous workload, certifying results, various reporting, meeting state mandated deadlines and completing all documentation, etc. There is no additional room in our schedule to add additional responsibilities related to extending absentee ballot provisions during our very short and legally required 3-day window to complete certifying the election. This proposal would delay election results and returns.

Have the proponents of the cumbersome proposal considered what processing each Absentee Ballot entails?

Each and every absentee incurs dozens of required micro-transactions.

Each absentee ballot must be entered into CVR before the Election Day incoming voter list can be printed; this is not optional and is important as the number one mechanism to prevent residents from voting twice. With voter preference to utilize the absentee voting on the rise, and the sheer volume of absentee ballots to process, removing the cut-off would make it practically impossible to complete our obligations and potentially compromise the integrity of the election process – it would be prudent to cut off sooner, not later.

Absentee Voting/Balloting takes a tremendous amount of time to process; and each Absentee is handled multiple times. A list of associated tasks is as follows:

- Inspection/preparation of ballots and envelope coding
- Completed application from Voter
- Entry into CVR, confirm information
- Ballot/envelope issuance
- Verification of qualified return
- Match return to original application
- Enter return into CVR
- Absentee ballot reporting
- Absentee ballot batching
- Absentee ballot auditing
- Specific procedures for Election Day processing:
 - Open envelopes – envelopes must be retained alphabetically by batch
 - Read names out loud and check off absentee voters on the incoming voting list – we are only allowed the one list and to get through the volume of ballots we must process while continuing to serve the “line” of Election Day voters
 - Place folded ballots into bins – separate municipal from state ballots
 - Insert ballots into voting machines in between voters that are lined up in person to do the same
 - Record in CVR any ballots returned after the voter list was printed
- Specific post-election processing of absentee ballot envelopes:
 - Audit reports
 - Final report
 - CVR reports

Specific storage/disposition requirements

Having to navigate this leading up to and on election day would undermine the integrity of the election process, and the health and well being of devoted public servants.

On behalf of myself and my fellow Municipal Clerks I thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of the concerns that have been expressed, I beseech you to oppose this catastrophic proposal.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Keller

Somerset County Clerks Association, President
Fairfield Municipal Clerk ▪ Voter Registrar ▪ Welfare Director