



**Testimony Neither for Nor Against
LD 580: "RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine
Regarding Early Voting"**

March 8, 2021

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Alysia Melnick and I am here to represent the Center for Secure and Modern Elections, an organization dedicated to advancing non-partisan, pro-voter policies at the state level that modernize the voting process and ensure that every eligible American citizen can have their voice heard through policies and reforms that create an election process that is efficient, accurate and secure.

I am here to testify neither for nor against LD 580, A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Regarding Early Voting. Allowing voters ample options to securely cast their ballots and allowing clerks ample time to process incoming ballots is a critical part of a functional, modern election system. Without raising the question of constitutionality, Maine can and should expand in-person absentee voting to improve pre-election day voting options both for clerks and voters.

Currently 44 states, including Maine, offer some form of pre-election day in-person voting. Some offer “true” early voting, where polling places are open for a period of days or weeks before election day and voters cast ballots just as they would on election day. Others, like Maine, use in-person absentee voting, where any voter can appear at the county or town clerk’s office, and cast an absentee ballot. (*See* 21-A Me. Rev. Stat. § 753-B(8)). We support an expansion of early voting options for voters and see this bill as one method to accomplish that goal.

There are several ways to improve the pre-election day voting experience in Maine without officially creating “true” early voting where polling places are open before Election Day, which can be handled statutorily.

1. **Maine can amend the statute to allow voters to use the voting machines used generally for in-person voting.** Maine currently requires in-person absentee voters to insert their ballot into an absentee ballot envelope and complete the information on the envelope, with the clerk serving as a witness. If towns could use voting machines that generate an auditable paper ballot, it would allow earlier tabulation and more efficient printing of the vote. Several states with in-person absentee voting, such as Virginia, Ohio, and Rhode Island, allow in-person absentee voting using the voting equipment typically used on election day.
2. **Maine can revise its absentee ballot processing procedures to allow these ballots to be processed immediately.** Maine law currently only allows absentee ballot processing to begin on the fourth day prior to the election, with counting only occurring after the polls close. *See* 21-A Me. Rev. Stat. § 760-B. However, many other states, including

Arizona, Florida, and Colorado, allow mail ballots to be processed and counted well before election day. Making the same change in Maine would allow in-person absentee to function as one-stop voting, where the person still uses a paper ballot and absentee envelope, which is immediately processed and counted. This would also avoid the current situation where a large number of in-person absentee envelopes must be processed in the days immediately before and after Election Day.

3. **Maine can offer in-person absentee voting at locations other than the town clerk's office.** Other states with in-person absentee voting, such as Iowa, Minnesota, and Virginia, make the process available at satellite centers outside of the central election office. Maine can amend its statutes governing in-person absentee voting to allow for towns to establish similar satellite centers at the discretion of the town clerk.

Regardless of the method of choice, expanding early voting options or early in-person absentee options for voters will reduce the burden on tabulators around Election Day, reduce overtime requirements for election workers, allow voters options to cast their ballots securely and conveniently, and instill public trust in election results that are released in a timely and error-free fashion. Thank you for your time.