



Town of Warren

167 Western Rd
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Date: March 3, 2021

To: Senator Louis J. Luchini, Senate Chair
Representative Chris Caiazzo, House Chair
And members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

From: Corinne Michaud, Town Clerk/Registrar, Warren, Maine

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

Position: Oppose

There are three main parts of this bill:

Part 1) Lines 10 and 11 - To delete/repeal Title 21-A, Section 753-B, subsection 2 D of the current law. This change would eliminate the three day deadline for any voter to request an absentee ballot and allow voters to request absentee ballots up until 7:59pm on election night.

Part 2) Lines 14 - 17 - Would allow a third party runner to return a voter's absentee ballot by 8pm on election night rather than within 2 business days of the date the Clerk issued the ballot to them.

Part 3) Lines 22 and 23 - Would allow any voter to vote by absentee ballot in the presence of the Clerk at any time up until 8pm on election day at any election. This change being to allow in-person absentee voting on Election Day.

I would like to take this opportunity to address the impact this bill would have on the election process in Warren, Maine. Warren is a small town with an approximate population of 5000, and currently 2940 registered voters. In the Nov. 3, 2020 election, 1030 voters voted at the polls, and 1234 absentee ballots were processed (for a total of 2264 voters). We have one full-time clerk/registrar and one full-time deputy clerk/registrar. In most cases, the town office remains open on Election Day, though due to pandemic requirements which indicated extra hands would be necessary on Election Day, the town office closed for the July and November 2020 elections.

I will address this clerk's concerns in regard to each portion as follows:

• Wayne Luce, Chair • Jan Macdonald, Vice Chair •
• Roger Peabody, Selectman • James Kinney, Selectman • Brent Pratt, Selectman

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Part 1 - Elimination of the three day deadline to request an absentee ballot -

Like most towns this past November, Warren issued and processed record number of absentee ballots. During the 2 week period before any election most of the Warren clerk's focus is spent issuing (either by mail or in person), tracking and curing absentee issues. This often, but not always, means that for the week prior to election, the clerk is staying late to do the necessary record keeping that absentee ballots require, as well as endeavoring to prepare all other aspects of maintaining a well-run polling place for election day, and attending to various duties, unrelated to the election, that become delayed while in-person absentee voting takes place. These extended hours do get passed along to the taxpayers, and that is one important concern of the burden that would be placed on the citizens of Warren; should this deadline be eliminated, it would require even more extended work hours for the clerk, and possibly hiring of temporary help. There is also the concern, should the three-day deadline be eliminated, that the period of time clerk's rely on to focus on other aspects of election preparation will be compromised. Warren voters turn out to vote, and the vast majority of our voters are in-person voters, (under traditional circumstances). Those voters deserve what they have come to count on: a well-organized, and efficient polling place. By eliminating the three-day deadline, this efficiency and our efforts for the in-person voters will be negatively affected.

Part 2 - To allow a third party to return a voter's absentee ballot by 8pm on election night rather than within 2 business days of the date the Clerk issued the ballot to them -

With a third-party ballot, the process is meant to be expeditious: voter designates, third-party carries ballot to voter, waits while the voter completes the ballot, and the third-party carrier has two days in which to return the ballot. By extending this deadline, rather than remaining with the current two-day return, the voter is not guaranteed expeditious return of their ballot to the clerk, which could result in missing ballots. Those voters that depend on this service deserve to know that their ballot was returned in a timely manner and that their vote will be included in the count.

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Part 3 - To allow any voter to vote by absentee ballot in the presence of the Clerk at any time up until 8pm on Election Day at any election -

For the Town of Warren, which has few hands in many places, this would create a hardship in a few ways:

The clerk would be removed from other duties which are meant to serve in creating a safe, efficient, accessible and ethical election place, in order to administer absentee ballots. Should another clerk be deputized to perform this task, it would create added expense to the taxpayer.

Creating a space for in-person absentee voting on Election Day would generate a burden on the physical environment of the polling place.

Should voters be allowed to vote in person at the Town Office on Election Day, counter service would be delayed, and much more concerning, an increased risk of voter fraud would be created. The incoming voter list is located at the polling place, and would need to be consulted, so the voter can be recorded as having been issued a ballot. This would mean calls back and forth between clerks; again, removing them from other priorities and diminishing their ability to serve those that are voting at the polls on Election Day, or have come into the office for non-election related activities.

Issuance of an absentee ballot is to make voting accessible to those that cannot get to the polls on Election Day. If a voter is able to get to the polls on Election Day, why would we create what amounts to a separate voting place? This proposed allowance makes very little sense in a logistical way, but most concerning about this allowance, whether at the town office or at the polls, is the chance of voter fraud. A voter could, hypothetically, vote in person at the town office, then immediately go to the polling place to vote. While you can be assured clerks would do their very best to prevent any fraud, this proposed allowance creates the possibility of an environment in which voter fraud would be a very real concern.

Maine clerks and the Secretary of State Elections Division work tremendously hard to ensure safe, non-partisan, accessible elections, run with utmost integrity. This bill overreaches in scope, and those who have been trusted to ensure safe, accessible voting can certainly see that this proposed bill would not only result in greater cost to the taxpayer, it would also increase the chance of voter fraud.

Respectfully submitted,

Corinne Michaud, Town Clerk/Registrar
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