



# City of Lewiston, Maine

## Department of City Clerk

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### **TESTIMONY ON LD 208– An Act To Expand Access to Absentee Ballots**

#### TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO LD 208

Kathleen Montejo, City Clerk of Lewiston  
March 8, 2021

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and Members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

I write today in Opposition of LD 208 and I offer a few points for your consideration:

- 1) The Thursday deadline to order a “no-excuse” absentee ballot has been in effect since 2011 and is working well. Voters are aware of this deadline and follow it. There were bills in 2013 and 2015 to remove this deadline and both bills failed. The current language in the statutes works for voters.
- 2) Maine essentially has “election month” and not “election day” anymore. This is good for the voters. Voters can order a “no-excuse” absentee ballot up to 90 days before any election and can receive one up to 30 days before any election. To illustrate this point, below are the Lewiston numbers from the November 2020 election:
  - 7,895 absentees issued via the mail
  - 4,522 absentees voted in person at City Hall in October
  - 5,212 election day at the polls

Voters are aware of their options to order a ballot in advance of election day and do so. Maine is lucky to be one of only six states that offer voters the opportunity to order a ballot over the telephone which is able to accommodate many elderly voters.

- 3) Voters who need to obtain an absentee ballot on Friday or Monday due to unforeseen circumstances such as a family emergency, unscheduled work obligation and others have an opportunity to receive one via the Special Circumstances application. This process has worked well to accommodate voters over the past 10 years.
- 4) By human nature, many voters will vote on the last available day to absentee vote, regardless of what day that is. As an example:

November 2000 presidential election – Monday was the last day to absentee vote – over 600 people voted in person at City Hall on the last day – prior to that day, there was an

average of less than 50 people per day voting in person

November 2020 presidential election – Friday was the last day to absentee vote – 522 people voted in person at City Hall on the last day – prior to that day, there was an average of 200 people per day voting in person

On Friday, October 30, 2020, I helped to manage the lines of voters to make sure people were maintaining social distancing, etc. As such, I had a great opportunity to speak with many voters who were in line that day and I asked them why they were voting this particular day as opposed to a few days or weeks earlier. All of them said they were voting on Friday because “it was the last day”. They said if the last day to vote was earlier such as two-three days prior, they would have been in on that day. None of the voters said they needed to wait until the last minute because they had not made up their minds, needed to watch all of the debates and candidate interviews, etc. Every voter I spoke with said the reason they were there was because it was the last day. This will happen whether the last day is Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Monday. It is simply human nature.

- 5) For effective election administration, municipalities need to have Friday to prepare for the early processing of absentee ballots on Saturday and need to have Monday to prepare for election day. Many tasks for these two events, which require a high degree of logistics, simply cannot be done in advance and must be done the day before. Tasks include setting up voting machines, printing the voter list and more.
- 6) Many voters in November 2020 were long-time voters but first-time absentee voters. Several commented on the ease, convenience and security of absentee voting and noted they plan to use this method of voting at all future elections. As such, the volume of absentee ballots that need to be processed early will not decrease and, as such, towns need to have the time on Friday, Saturday and Monday to be able to focus to process these absentees correctly while not simultaneously working to issue absentee ballots.

For these reasons, I recommend the Committee consider opposing LD 208.

I respectfully encourage you to please listen to the comments submitted by our state’s Local Election Administrators, most of whom have served for several years and many who have served for decades. We are the front-line election staff that implement the process on the ground level and understand the logistics involved in administering an election for the voters.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony.