



City of Biddeford, Maine

Carmen J. Morris
City Clerk

Date: March 4, 2021

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

From: Carmen J. Morris, City Clerk of Biddeford

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

Position: Opposed

I will address the three main parts of this bill:

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

When this law was established in 2011, it came as a huge relief to Clerks all over the State. The final days leading up to Election Day are hectic and full of pre-election activities that need to be completed prior to the polls opening on Election Day. Allowing voters to either pick up absentee ballots and/or vote in the presence of the Clerk adds so much more work than most of Maine's Clerk's Offices can physically handle. The three day deadline allows Clerks to concentrate on entering new voter registrations and thus, be able to print the most up-to-date Incoming Voter List possible; conduct early processing of absentee ballots that have already been received back in the Clerk's Office; set up the polling place(s); and any and all other last minute tasks that need to be done prior to the opening of the polls.

It is important to keep in mind that since the inception of this law, Maine communities have seen substantial increases in absentee voters. More and more folks are voting absentee for a myriad of reasons, with the most important of those reasons being convenience. As Biddeford's City Clerk, I am a huge advocate for absentee voting and I encourage ways to make the absentee voting process as easy and efficient as possible for our voters; however, I am realistic in that there needs to be a cut-off to request absentee ballots so that efficiencies can be maintained and the integrity of the process is not compromised.

It is also important to note that even with the three day deadline in place, there is still a provision in the law that allows voters to vote absentee with a "special circumstance." This provision has worked well to protect those voters who unexpectedly cannot make it to the poll on Election Day, or have a disability that keeps them from going to the poll.

Maine law allows for a very long absentee ballot request period. Voters may request an absentee ballot up to three months prior to an election. Absentee ballot requests can be made in a

number of ways, from calling the Clerk's Office, using the online Absentee Ballot Request program, or going to the Clerk's Office and completing an Absentee Ballot Application. Three months is ample time for voters to decide whether they want to vote by absentee ballot or not; as well as to make the request, receive the ballot(s) and return the ballot(s) to the Clerk's Office. The fact that voters are not required to give a reason for requesting an absentee ballot makes the process even more accessible and easy for ALL Maine voters.

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:

In my opinion, this is an accountability issue. By definition, a third party ballot carrier is not related to the voter, and could essentially be someone the voter barely knows. In order to protect that voter's rights, as well as the integrity of the absentee voting process, the 2 business days' mandate is necessary. There is no reason why anyone should have possession of another voter's absentee ballot for more than the allotted time.

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:

The arguments I presented in Part 1 also pertain to this Part. Additionally, it is common sense that if a voter can make it into the Clerk's Office on election day, then they can certainly make it to the polling place. In Biddeford, our Clerk's Office is open on election day for business as usual. Staff is busy assisting citizens with vehicle registrations, issuance of vital records, payments of various fees, and other Clerk/Tax functions that are performed in our already busy office. Allowing in-person absentee voting on top of all other counter transactions would completely overload the Staff working in the office on election day (which is usually half the typical staffing levels since half the Staff works at the poll as Voter Registrars on election day).

In closing, I thank you for your attention and consideration of these law changes. I am hopeful that the Committee votes along the same lines of thinking as a large majority of the Maine Clerks and opposes this bill.

Respectfully,


Carmen J. Morris, City Clerk of Biddeford