



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: Ann Morrison
Town Clerk, Town of Lincoln

Re: LD208 -An Act to Expand Access to Absentee Ballots

Position: Oppose

As a Town Clerk in Lincoln, Maine I am OPPOSED to LD208. For discussion sake, I will address each part individually with my concerns.

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

While Lincoln may have smaller voter turn-outs in non-Presidential years, they really come out for the Presidential elections and elections that have “high stakes” such as marijuana or items voters are passionate about. When these years come around, my staff is extremely busy. For example, this past November we processed (filled absentee requests, conducted voting in the presence of the clerk) more than we did regular counter transactions on some days. This puts a hardship on myself and my staff. Lincoln is considered a “Service Community” where we serve 25,000+/- residents in our area. If we lose the three-days we are able to finalize and process absentee ballots this will force me to try and find extra workers, pay out additional money for staffing and stand the chance of having some inaccuracies in our numbers as we are rushed through the process. If I lose my opportunity to process early, I will have no time or spare equipment on election day to process these ballots efficiently. This will again mean I need to pay extra money out to have workers stay longer into the night and pay the janitorial staff at the school extra for also staying longer into the night. With my aging election workers and no younger generation anxious to help out, I have the task of being Clerk and Warden. As it is, I bring in Town Staff as Warden’s and ballot counters when I fall short of election workers on my list; and this pandemic has only made it worse. Voters have 90-days in which to request an absentee ballot, giving the voter plenty of time to plan how they wish to cast their vote. Their procrastination should not overrule what tasks the Clerks have to do in order to run and maintain a safe and fair election process. We should not feel rushed and then accused later of fraud if a genuine mistake is made.



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

This section of LD208 concerns me in the fact that if the third party is allowed to return a voter's ballot up until 8pm on election night and there is an error, there is no time for the third party to allow the voter to correct the issue. In Lincoln, no matter how hard we try to inform the voter, we still have many issues with witness requirements. I would hate to have to challenge or reject a ballot due to improper signatures or witness statements not being completed.

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

This change proposed in LD208 would allow in-person absentee voting on election day. It has commonly been stated that if a voter can physically get to their Clerk's office on election day, they can get themselves to the polling place. This simple act is to uphold the integrity of the election process. If this is allowed it would be like having an additional polling place within Lincoln and I simply do not have the staff to allow for this. My biggest question on this section is would the Clerk's office have to be open until 8pm? Again, this would require additional staffing, money, etc. Many times, here in Lincoln, one or more of my staff come up to the polls after closing the office to assist in any way that they can. I cannot have all of my workers working 12+ hour days.

If this section is to allow a voter to avoid the polling place due to parking issues, avoiding petitioners or long lines the voter has a three-month opportunity to request an absentee ballot in advance of election day.

In summary, it seems as though LD208 is to allow a little more convenience for the voter at my expense. These slight changes would significantly impact the ability for me, "an election expert" to effectively staff, organize and manage the entire voting process. Instead of having an election on one day, we are now conducting an election for a month. At some point, the voter needs to take responsibility of their constitutional right to vote.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my testimony with the Committee. If you have any further questions after the public hearing, please feel free to contact me at (207) 794-3372 or by email: ann.morrison@lincolnmaine.org.