



April 5, 2021

Dear Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in support of LD 1126, An Act To Update the Voter Registration Process**. We thank Representative Pierce for sponsoring this bill.

Women are dedicated voters in Maine and across the country, and vote at higher rates than men—Black and brown women even more so. In the 2020 Presidential election, women were 59 percent of the total voters.¹ Yet in many cases, they experience more barriers to the franchise, especially women from marginalized or disenfranchised communities. National data indicate that on average, Black female voters have to wait twice as long to vote as white voters (overall).²

Many of the same barriers that have resulted in women carrying a disproportionate burden during the pandemic (resulting in much higher rates of job loss and unemployment) are the same barriers in accessing voting. **Women are more likely to be care providers in their families, providing the greater share of childcare duties, elder care, or other unpaid care labor. Women are more likely to be in low-wage positions with less flexibility. They are more likely to head single-parent households.** These factors are typically not discussed as part of the traditional barriers to voting, and yet we know that navigating these duties poses very real challenges in the daily lives of Mainers. For those with added barriers - lack of transportation, language or literacy needs, accessibility needs – it becomes that much harder. That is why so many statewide systems, such as driver's license renewal, have moved to increased flexibility and online access.

Online voter registration is a common-sense update that accounts for the real needs of people in our communities. It is a safe, secure system, already used in multiple states, which allows people to become part of the political process, in much the same way they would apply for a driver's license, unemployment insurance, or public benefits. It does not solve the challenges above, but it creates more ease of access, helping people to more fully engage.

Voting is not only a right and a privilege – it is the tool that we use to build the Maine we want to live in. When every eligible Mainer can participate in that building, we are more likely to shape policies and systems that lift up all of our communities and reflect our collective needs and strengths. Participation and engagement in every system improves when we account for the

¹ Washington Post (2020). Exit poll results and analysis from Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/interactive/2020/exit-polls/maine-exit-polls/>

² Stewart, C. (2013). Waiting to Vote in 2012. Journal of Law and Politics. Retrieved August 2, 2020.



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

realities of people's lives – their employment structure, work schedules, family duties, accessibility needs, and more.

Picture a single mom with two young kids still in a stroller, and no car. She works a low-wage part time job, and counts on TANF to make ends meet. She can apply for TANF online, and walk to work, but in order to register to vote, she has to find a ride for her family of three to city hall between the hours of 9 and 5, Monday through Friday, navigate the stroller through a 19th century building, and wait in line with two toddlers. The harder it is to vote the less likely people are to do it. We believe, and hope you agree, that this woman deserves to vote as much as anyone in Maine – and perhaps more so than those who have other paths to representation and civic power.

It is time to move Maine into the modern era and allow Mainers to use the same system to register to vote as they use for so many other aspects of their lives and business.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1126.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org