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Testimony of Representative Teresa S. Pierce presenting

LD 1126, An Act To Update the Voter Registration Process

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Good morning, Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, my name is Teresa S. Pierce. I represent House District 44 in Falmouth. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to present **LD 1126, An Act To Update the Voter Registration Process**.

In 2020, a record number of Americans voted in the general election — a remarkable achievement to see in the midst of a pandemic. Here in Maine, we owe a lot to our town clerks, poll workers and other election administrators for enabling so many people to cast their ballots safely and securely. Moving forward, we need to be looking at ways that we can replicate those successes and continue taking steps to improve our voting systems in order to strengthen our democracy.

Serving my fourth term in the Maine House of Representatives and after being on the Falmouth Town Council for six years, I know from firsthand experience that our democracy is only as strong as people's participation in it. In order for our elected officials to best represent our communities' needs, we need as many people as possible showing up to the polls to make their voices heard.

We are fortunate to live in Maine, a state that has long established itself as a leader in administering safe, secure elections that yield some of the highest voter turnout in the country. But there is certainly room for improvement. That is why I've introduced LD 1126, which is designed to make voting more accessible by creating an online registration system.

Currently, 40 other states and D.C. successfully offer online voter registration, which allows voters to submit their information through an online portal designed by the Secretary of State. Voters would also be able to use the online portal to update their existing registration in the case

of a change of address, party enrollment, name or any other piece of personal information. While Mainers would still be able to register through the paper-based process, this online system would offer an easy alternative for many people who would otherwise have difficulty getting to their town office during open hours, such as Mainers who are homebound, work long hours or live in remote areas.

An online voter registration system would also benefit town clerks and other election administrators. In 2020, as hundreds of thousands of voters mailed their voter registration forms to their respective clerks' offices, clerks faced significant financial and administrative burdens in processing all of these registrations in a timely manner. Online voter registration reduces the cost on our towns and election administrators by eliminating the need for clerks to complete hours of burdensome manual data entry. That frees up time for our clerks to do what they do best: administer safe and secure elections.

The system would also enhance the security of our elections. By ensuring only complete and correct information is being submitted to clerks, online voter registration almost completely removes the chance of misinterpreting or mis-transcribing handwritten data and compromising voters' information. Additionally, since relying heavily on paper forms runs the risk of voters' forms and information being lost, the online portal would keep voters' personal data safe by creating an electronic, encrypted record of each submission.

The more people who participate in our democracy, the stronger our representation will be. If we want to pass legislation that truly meets the needs of Maine people, we need to make the voter registration process easier for folks who are eligible. Passing LD 1126 and creating an online voter registration system in Maine is a critical step in the right direction.

I understand that others, including Secretary of State Shenna Bellows, are here to provide you with more information and context about this proposal. I would also be happy to take any questions you may have for me. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Teresa S. Pierce". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Teresa S. Pierce