



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Opposition to:
LD 253, LD 557, LD 1083, LD 1099**

Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
State House, Room 437
Wednesday, April 7, 2021

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. I am here to provide testimony in opposition to:

- **LD 253:** An Act To Strengthen Maine's Election Laws by Requiring Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting
- **LD 557:** An Act To Require Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting
- **LD 1083:** An Act To Create a Voter Identification System
- **LD 1099:** An Act Regarding Election Reform

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 500 individual members and 30 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities and we take that responsibility seriously.

These bills aim to change Maine voting law by requiring voters to provide photo identification, among other provisions, including restricting absentee voting, rescinding voting eligibility for incarcerated persons, and denying the ability to cast ballots to people waiting in line at the time polls close.

At MPHA, we support making voting accessible, secure, and equitable for all eligible voters in Maine. We believe the provisions in these bills contribute to voter suppression, even if that is not the sponsors' intents; lack evidence to support need or improved election security; and limit voting access for eligible voters in Maine.

In 1988, the Institute of Medicine published a landmark report, [*The Future of Public Health*](#), which acknowledges that voting is a public health issue because it helps shape "the conditions in which people can be healthy." [The American Public Health Association considers voting to be a public health issue](#) because it impacts civic policies ranging from budgets to carrying firearms to insurance and LGBTQ rights.

[According to Dr. Edward Ehlinger](#), past-president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), voting directly impacts health: "Research conducted in 44 countries showed that civic participation, specifically [voter participation, was associated with better self-reported health](#)—while another study showed

that those who did not vote reported poorer health outcomes. Historically, we can see this trend play out via suffrage and voting rights. While other factors were of course at play, it was after women got the right to vote in 1920 that the maternal and infant mortality rates dropped dramatically. This can be attributed to the passage of the Sheppard Towner Act of 1921, which set up maternal and child health units in every state health department, expanded collection of birth and death data, and began federal funding of state health programs. Similarly, when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, infant mortality rates dropped and the Black/white disparity in those rates narrowed, again because of legislation that was passed in response to new voter enfranchisement.”

We believe ensuring that all eligible voters can cast their ballots fairly and equitably is a public health priority, given its strong association with health equity and health outcomes, and ensures election integrity.

To address specific considerations in these bills: Some individuals may experience barriers to having photo identification, including persons experiencing homelessness, older adults, persons with disabilities, and people who oppose having their photo taken due to religious or cultural beliefs. There is no evidence to support that requiring photographic identification improves security; however, there is evidence that there are disparities in ownership of photo identification along racial lines.¹ Limiting absentee voting, as outlined in LD 1099, would be prohibitive for many people in Maine, including older adults who may be unable to drive to the polls, people who do not have work flexibility and are unable to take time off to vote, people who are hospitalized, or otherwise unable to travel to the voting booth.

We respect wanting to ensure election security. However, we believe we can ensure election security while also ensuring all eligible Maine voters are able to cast their ballots fairly and equitably. We believe accessible elections are essential to protecting and promoting public health. Currently, Maine is a national leader in voter accessibility. We are proud of that leadership and strongly oppose each of these bills. We respectfully request you vote LD 253, LD 557, LD 1083, and LD 1099 “ought not to pass.” Thank you for your consideration.

¹Government Accountability Office (GAO). Issues related to state voter identification laws. September 2014. GAO Report to Congressional Requesters. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-14-634>.