



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on
Veterans & Legal Affairs**

**In opposition to LD 253 –
An Act To Strengthen Maine's Election Laws by Requiring
Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting**

Delivered in writing on April 7, 2021

Greetings Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans & Legal Affairs:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older Mainers working together to make sure we all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities.

I am writing in opposition to LD 322 because we are concerned that this legislation will have the unintended consequence of disenfranchising tens of thousands of older Maine citizens who are already experiencing challenges in exercising their constitutional right to vote.

Consider these facts:

- More than 193,000 people in Maine are age 70 or older; more than 66,000 of these people are over 80.
- Nearly a third of people over 65 years of age in Maine live alone.
- According to Maine's 2025 Strategic Transit Plan, 72% of older Mainers live in communities without access to fixed route transit or one of the larger flex route transit systems.

There can be no question that older people value their independence above all else. In most of Maine, the ability to drive is inexorably linked to one's independence, so most people hold onto their driver's licenses as long as possible. Still, thousands of older Mainers stop driving each year due to age or illness, either voluntarily or otherwise. In 2019, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety estimated that about 17% of people 70 and older did not have a driver's license. In Maine, this translates to about 33,000 people age 70 and older who do not hold a current driver's license. And this estimate was made before COVID! After all the time everyone, especially high-risk individuals, has spent confined to the home because of COVID, it is likely that even more people will stop driving. So the number of people without a driver's license is likely higher.

Even still, 33,000 is a big number-- those people who no longer hold a current driver's license in Maine. How many of them have taken the next step to have some other type of photographic identification once their license lapsed? Our Advocacy Director has a mother who is 90 – she stopped driving since the pandemic but has not even considered getting a photo ID. Again, in ordinary times, some might still have a valid passport, but with travel still a high risk activity, some passports will expire and not be renewed.

Older adults who don't drive and don't have access to public transportation have to rely on others to get to medical appointments, church, the grocery store, the bank, and to the hairdresser. They also have to arrange a ride to the polls to vote. If they don't live with a spouse or adult relative, they have to rely on family, friends, and neighbors to meet their basic transportation needs.

Here's the rub – none of us like to ask for help. We ask when we have to, but we only ask when we have no other options and we try hard not to burden others. Many of us independent Mainers would rather go without before putting someone else out. So, while many of us will be compelled to ask for rides to medical appointments and to get groceries when we can no longer drive, most of us won't likely ask for rides that aren't completely necessary.

If a person no longer drives, securing a new government-issued ID would be a significant hardship. This is normally an interaction that must be done in person, where the person seeking the ID must get a ride to a motor vehicle office, present various documents that prove residency and have a photo taken. For some, health issues prevent this kind of travel; others may still be reluctant to be in busy public places, others simply will not find someone willing to drive them for that purpose; and still others may not be able to reimburse a driver for gas. Most simply won't want to put someone else out the several hours this trip might take, just to gain access to an ID they otherwise do not need.

If this law takes effect, we're concerned that thousands of older adults will simply not go to the polls if they don't have an ID or they won't take the steps necessary to obtain a non-driver ID before voting. Many may not realize there is this new requirement until they try to cast their ballot and discover the need for documentation that they don't have and have never needed before. If they go to the polls without an ID, it is unlikely they will be able to get an ID within 3 days of casting a provisional ballot.

Right now, there is no reason for an older Mainer to have to go through this process. However, if LD 253 is enacted, it will require thousands of older Mainers who do not currently hold valid government issued IDs to secure them if they want to exercise their constitutional right to vote. This creates a significant inequity for some portion of older Mainers who will simply be unable to clear these hurdles.

Maine has one of, if not the highest, percentage of older voters in any state in the country. We should be proud about this level of voter engagement and should be doing everything possible to ensure that older Mainers continue to have access to this precious right as their age increases and ability to get around declines. It makes no sense to enact a law that would significantly interfere with the ability of thousands of older voters to exercise this constitutional right. We urge you to vote in opposition to this bill.

If this law is intended to avoid voter fraud, we urge the Committee to find a more surgical way to address specific incidents of voter fraud than to impose a requirement that will impact a significant number of older people who have every right to cast their ballot.

Thank you.

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