

Good Day to the Members of Maine's Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee,

I am a Veteran, a Gold Star wife, and a Blue Star mom. After 30+ years of military service to this great nation, I write with deep concern regarding four bills - LDs 253, 557, 1083, and 1099. I believe these proposals attack the very core of the Democracy for which my family has served, the one my husband died for.

The right to vote is fundamental to being the citizen of a country. In the nations where my family served, the ability to vote is treasured.

I can remember the shining eyes and proud smiles of the quiet, female Afghans who worked in our US compound in Kabul. Returning to the complex after an off-site break, heads high and shoulders squared, they showed off their purple-stained index fingers indicating they had voted. It was the first time the women were able to vote. For them, voting was a symbol of their independence, of their equality, and of their bravery. Just the attempt to vote put them in danger. We hugged and kissed the women congratulating them for taking part in the future of their country. It gave me a sense, even if it was ever so small, of hope for Afghanistan.

Some may opine that the elections in Afghanistan are corrupt. The government might be but the ordinary people who vote, much like us, are not corrupt. They vote under threats of violence. In Herat, like colored fingers were sliced off by the Taliban and yet folks there continued to vote.

I vote and have served as a poll watcher in Washington County for several elections. Every time I see someone place their ballot in that voting machine or ballot box, I recall those smiling, happy faces and purple fingers. They make me smile once again. However, it makes me sad to see so many of fellow Americans pass by the polling centers declining to take part in this one activity that makes the USA, the envy of the world.

What concerns me more is the tide of bills that seek to quash the ability of all of us to vote. My family has voted absentee from places all over the world. We didn't need to show photo ID cards because we certified under penalty of law on the ballot that we were who we said we were.

I read in the proposals that one must show a photo ID to register and when voting. Why? What kind of and how many instances of voter fraud have been committed in Maine? My own experience bolsters my impression that elections here are fair and square.

What I also find ironic that a military ID is OK, but a Veterans Affairs ID is not. Both are issued by the federal government. A concealed weapon ID with a photo is OK but a UM student ID with photo is not. Both are issued by state agencies. How much is it going to cost the state of Maine – oh, that's really us taxpayers -- to manufacture photo IDs for voting purposes? In essence, this is a poll tax.

Under another proposal, if a friend who is disabled on a fixed income, wants to vote absentee, she'll need to jump through a bunch of bureaucratic hoops that don't make much sense. Unlike in this past (2020) election, under the proposal she would need to certify a reason why she is unable to vote in person. It also requires two other persons to collect and deliver the ballot, each of whom must certify the collection and delivery to the election clerk. Why? How is she supposed to find two people to hand-carry her ballot to the election clerk? I know she'll feel obligated to reimburse them for their time and transportation, too.

And God forbid if people are standing in line when it is poll closing time – they may not be able to vote at all.

Give me a break! None of the proposals pass any logic test.

What LDs 253, 557, 1083, and 1099 do is perpetuate unproven falsehoods of widespread voter fraud where there was none. Every complaint of alleged voter fraud in the 2020 was thrown out of court because there was no evidence to support the allegations.

What these proposals do is reinforce a bogus notion that our friends and neighbors who serve as election clerks and poll workers are incompetent, corrupt, and unworthy of our trust.

What LDs 253, 557, 1083, and 1099 do is construct obstacles to participate in our Democracy's most basic right – the right to vote -- for everyday folks like farmers, loggers, fisher- and lobster-men, shift workers, members of the military, veterans, people with disabilities, minorities, first-time voters, students, elders, and low-income Americans. In other words, you and me.

In essence, they suppress that right to vote. I hope all four of these ill-conceived schemes die the death they deserve here in committee.

I urge the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee to reinforce our trust in each other by killing LDs 253, 557, 1083, and 1099.

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