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REVISED: Testimony Presenting LD 1121
"An Act To Create an Open and Streamlined Primary System"

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Good morning, Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. I am Senator Joe Baldacci and I represent Senate District 9, which is made up of Bangor and Hermon. I am here today to present LD 1121, "An Act Create an Open and Streamlined Primary System."

I am presenting this bill today because I believe Mainers have the right to be more involved in our political system and that our current primary election system is outdated. This bill would provide open primaries for the elections of United States Senator, United States Representative to Congress, Governor, State Senator and State Representative. This bill would make it so all of the candidates for those offices, regardless of party or unenrolled, would appear on the same open primary ballot. This bill proposes that votes be tabulated using ranked-choice voting, except that the 2 candidates who receive the most votes for their respective seats would be declared winners and their names then must appear on the ballot for general election. As a result, ranked-choice voting will not be used in the general elections, but reserved only for the open primary elections. Instead, a candidate who receives a plurality of the votes at the general election will be elected to those offices. Under this model, Mainers still get to exercise the ranked-choice voting model they voted for but in a more efficient and transparent way.

It is my belief that using an open primary election model like the one this bill describes would decrease the partisan polarization in this state. After the horrific events at the U.S. Capitol earlier this year, I think it is safe to say that partisanship polarization is at an all time high while trust in our elections is mixed across the country. With open primaries, we can begin to reconcile the partisan divide earlier on in the election cycle by providing a way to get Mainers more involved in the election process. Currently, political affiliation is required to participate in our state's taxpayer funded primary elections. Maine independents currently make up 32.5% of all voters in Maine yet they are barred from participating in primary elections unless they declare affiliation.¹ This bill would allow them to start participating in our election process earlier, as they should be allowed to.

¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2020/06/28/democrats-take-lead-in-voter-registrations-in-maine/>
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Across the country, Independents are growing more popular than the two major parties.² This is a trend that will continue, as millennials play a large role in this shift. Maine needs to adjust its current primary system to reflect that trend. We are currently disenfranchising Maine Independents from choosing the major election nominees and this bill will fix that.

Maine's current mixed primary system is not reflective of Maine voters, it is outdated, and it is time we take action. Fifteen other states currently operate with open primaries³, and I say it is time for Maine to join them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would happily answer any questions you may have.

² <https://www.npr.org/2017/07/04/535402488/in-america-every-day-is-independents-day#res535403553~:text=The%20uptick%20in%20%22independent%22%20identification%20has,sharper%20climb%20that%20other%20generations%20had.>

³ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primary-types.aspx>

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Revised testimony for LD 1121