

Alicia Barnes
Augusta

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee:

I'm here testifying as a veteran who defended the Constitution to defend it again in support of allowing all eligible Mainers to participate in our elections, whether they chose to join a party or not, by supporting L.D. 231, "An Act to Establish Open Primaries."

Shortly after I enlisted in the Navy, my ship, the USS Kearsarge, deployed to the Persian Gulf with six other ships and 10,000 Marines for Operation Iraqi Freedom. We went to war.

I enlisted for many reasons. A sense of duty and a commitment to country, but the Navy also helped me put food on my family's table and keep a roof over their head. This was especially important for my son, who was a toddler when I deployed.

I am grateful for my time in the Navy and for the opportunities it provided me, and I have done my best to pay-it-forward. I sat on the board of the Betty Ann Ross House of Hope, a transitional home for homeless female veterans and their children, and served as the peer support lead for a veteran support group at the Togus VA.

And, I am here today to respectfully ask that you vote in support of L.D. 231.

You see, veterans are more affected by Maine's closed primary laws than nearly any other group. Nationally, 49% of veterans identify as political independents. Many of these veterans have gone to war to protect our democratic ideals, and yet here in Maine they are prohibited from fully participating in our democratic process.

This is shameful. My fellow veterans who are eligible to vote should be permitted to do so, even if they have chosen not to enroll in a political party.

Thank you for your consideration.

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