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**Testimony of Representative Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 231, *An Act To Establish Open Primaries***

**Before the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
12 April 2021**

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am Nicole Grohoski, and I represent the communities of Ellsworth and Trenton in the Maine House. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of LD 231, An Act To Establish Open Primaries.

Whenever I'm weighing decisions and votes in Augusta -- or, this year, from home via zoom with you all, my colleagues, scattered across the state -- I aim to stay grounded in the community I represent. It's clear to me from the conversations I've had at doors and around my district these past few years that many of us share the same values, and I think that holds true across Maine. We work hard, help our neighbors, and believe that a person's character is what matters most. We also value our civic duty to participate in the political process, turning out to vote at a rate that is the envy of the nation.

Yet currently, our political process isn't living up to our shared values. That is why I support LD 231, which would allow semi-open primaries, meaning unenrolled voters -- often referred to as independents here in Maine -- would be permitted to cast one ballot in the party primary of their choice. Republicans would not be able to vote in Democratic primaries and Democrats would not be able to vote in Republican primaries.

There is a saying that "all politics are local," and in Hancock County, 30% of registered voters are unenrolled and therefore currently unable to participate in primary elections without jumping through hoops. These are friends and neighbors who are registered to vote, engaged in the political process, and paying for elections in which they are not permitted to participate. This status quo is not in line with our values -- our electorate deserves better.

Fortunately, LD 231 will address our flawed system. Opening Maine's primaries to unenrolled voters will improve voter access and increase voter participation. It means that our unenrolled friends will be able to more fully participate in a system for which they are already paying, without having to temporarily affiliate with a party. Unenrolled voters are no more or less informed than other voters and we would benefit from hearing from them.

Mainers are practical and appreciate common-sense solutions to problems that need not exist. Semi-open primaries aren't cutting edge. Nine states already allow for them, including nearby New Hampshire and Massachusetts. In fact, Maine is only one of 14 states that has completely closed primaries. For a state that values and takes pride in our voter participation, it's clear we can do better.

Mainers want to make this change -- 80% of Maine voters support semi-open primaries, yes, 80%! There are few issues with this much consensus, and I hope you will recognize the will of the people and join me in supporting LD 231. Thank you for considering this important reform to our voting system. I would be happy to answer any questions.