



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini
The Honorable Chris Caiazzo, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: April 12, 2021

RE: LD 231 An Act to Establish Open Primaries
LD 303 An Act To Establish Semi-open Primary Elections To Allow Unenrolled Voters To Participate

Good morning Senator Luchini and Representative Caiazzo.

My name is Anna Kellar. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as an Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in support of LD 231.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working for over 100 years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

The League of Women Voters of Maine believes that primary elections should encourage broad voter participation and that all voters should have the opportunity to participate in the primary election of their choice. More specifically, LWVME supports "semi-open" primaries over the various forms of closed or fully open primaries for candidate selection at all governmental levels.

Unenrolled voters in Maine comprise 33% of Maine's voters, a larger group than either registered Republicans or registered Democrats. Among veterans, 49% are unenrolled. , as are 50% of Millennials. With the implementation of Automatic Voter Registration (AVR), the percentage of unenrolled voters may increase.

When unenrolled voters are excluded from party primaries, their candidate options are limited by more partisan voters and may have limited appeal to the electorate at large. In jurisdictions dominated by a single party, the candidate who wins the party primary is essentially guaranteed to win the general election. Given the significant structural and institutional supports that buttress the two-party system in American politics, and given the very high likelihood that one of the major-party candidates will win any given election, the League supports broad participation in that selection process.

While unenrolled voters in Maine can vote in the party primaries by registering a party preference on the day of the election, eliminating the registration requirement would reduce the psychological barrier of

those voters who do not want to declare a party and the paperwork required of voters and local election officials would be reduced. Compelling voters to become a member of a party in order to vote in a primary is not only a needless burden, it also violates their right to refrain from joining a party if they choose. The well-known constitutional freedom of association also entails the freedom *not to associate*.

The League of Women Voters of Maine gives its highest priority to policy principles that protect and expand voter participation and turnout in all elections, including candidate selection systems. We believe that primary elections should encourage broad voter participation and that all voters should have the opportunity to participate in the primary election of their choice. For that reason, we support LD 231.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

