

## Testimony In Support of LD 231 “An Act to Establish Open Primaries”

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

Democracy is bigger than any one individual or group. It is not something that any single person or party possesses. It belongs to us all. We have seen some of the real dangers and negative effects when our democracy becomes more about particular people or political parties than about taking care of its citizenry. We have also seen and recognize some of the amazing things that can happen when citizens from all walks of life come together for the betterment of our state and nation. I believe LD 231 “An Act to Establish Open Primaries” is part of this betterment.

This bill would give the almost one-third of registered Maine voters who identify as independent an equal voice in their democracy and not deny them the opportunity to vote in a primary just because they do not identify as either a Democrat or Republican. It would allow independents to finally access primaries that are funded by their own tax dollars. It would allow a disproportionate number of veterans--49% nationally of whom identify as independent/other than Democrat or Republican--the ability to have their voice heard in primaries. Continuing to deny veterans access to primary elections, especially when many of them have risked their lives to preserve our democracy, seems ironic at best if not downright insulting given that it is the primary election that often determines the ultimate winner in many non-competitive general election contests.

I understand that LD 231 may be perceived by some as a potential threat to established political parties of which the vast majority of you are affiliated. I believe, however, that this bill provides opportunities for political parties. Passing this bill would send a message to independents that parties want them engaged and want their vote. It allows for a broader swath of voter support, which can only strengthen party candidates once they reach the general election. It also would remove a barrier to participation from young people and Millennials--50% of whom identify as independent--so that they have more access to play a role in elections, providing the opportunity for parties to inspire and engage these members of our citizenry.

Given the upcoming implementation of automatic voter registration, there may be an increasing number of younger and more independent voters registering and thus an increasing percentage of citizens left out of the primary process if this bill does not pass. This could unintentionally change a tool designed to include citizens in elections into one that is disproportionately exclusive. This would be a shame given that Maine has a rich history of independent thinking and electoral inclusion. Please continue to invest in Maine's strengths by supporting LD 231 and opening up primaries to the independent voters of Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jeremy Lynch  
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*Sources referenced plus a recent gallup poll on the increase in number of independents:*

PEW 50% of Millennials identify as independent:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>

Portland Press Herald, 1/3 of Maine Voter Identify as Independent:

<https://www.pressherald.com/2018/11/05/state-even-more-democratic-as-rural-lean-to-right-continues/?rel=related>

PEW: 49% of Veterans Independent or Other:

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/26/u-s-veterans-are-generally-supportive-of-trump/>

Gallup Poll 44% of Voters Identify as Independent:

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/343976/quarterly-gap-party-affiliation-largest-2012.aspx>