

Clare Payne
Brooksville

Testimony in Support of
LD 231 "An Act To Establish Open Primaries"
Submitted by Clare Hudson Payne and Peter Sly

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

We write in support of LD 231 "An Act To Establish Open Primaries," which would allow unenrolled voters to vote in a primary election. While we come from different political perspectives we strongly agree that opening Maine's primaries to unenrolled voters is a crucial step to heal the divisions in our civil institutions.

Clare has been enrolled as a Republican since moving to Maine more than 40 years ago. Peter Sly has usually voted for Democrats, but has occasionally supported a Republican.

We are both deeply committed to citizen participation in the election process. It is not enough to talk about politics but rather, we must go the next step and vote. For the most part, Maine's voting system encourages citizen participation by reducing barriers to voting. But when it comes to the primary process, we do not permit a third of our citizens to vote because they are not party members.

While some may say, "let them join the party if they want to vote," we believe we should encourage all registered voters to participate in selecting candidates in a contested primary.

While we appreciate that these "independent" voters could enroll in a party, they have chosen not to do so. Enrolling in a party, or choosing NOT to enroll in a party, is a significant personal decision. These voters have done nothing wrong by choosing not to register with a party. Maine law permits them to do this. Unfortunately for them, if they register as unenrolled, the door to voting in the primaries is closed. Even though they pay taxes, which are used to run the primary elections, they can't vote.

The proposed law would make Maine a "semi open" primary state. This law would NOT permit those registered with a party to vote in the other party's primary. It simply grants independent voters the right to vote in a primary. As the Ellsworth American stated this week, "Maine's state motto is Dirigio, 'I lead.' When it comes to voting, let the people lead every step of the way."

A healthy political process requires voters to exercise their right to vote. Opening the door to our primaries to unenrolled voters would permit all voters to vote in the June primary elections, not just in November.

Respectfully submitted,

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