

Jim Shaffer
Freeport

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

From: Jim Shaffer, Freeport, April 8, 2021

Re: Support of LD 231, "An Act to Establish Open Primaries," in hearing of April 12, 2021
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I consider myself a political independent, so why am I enrolled in a party? It is because, as an independent, I can't participate in primary elections even though I have paid for these as a taxpayer. Primary elections are important because they determine who the candidates will be in general elections. But 32% of Maine's voters, and 50% of voters 18-29, are unenrolled and can't participate in this stage of the democratic process.

Over the years I've seen worthy candidates from both parties, and in order to help them reach the general election, my solution has been to frequently change my party registration. But this is tedious, and most independents don't bother. They just don't participate in primaries. A solution to this anti-democratic situation would be LD 231, "An Act to Establish Open Primaries." It should probably be titled "An Act to Establish Semi-open Primaries," because Republicans would not be able to vote in Democratic primaries or vice-versa, but independents like me would be allowed to cast one vote in the one primary of their choice.

I hear the argument that allowing un-enrolled voters to choose in which party's primary election to participate would allow these voters to strategically sabotage a particular party's election. Further, I hear the argument that one party's members could actually unenroll and become independents in order to sabotage the other party's primary. But as you know, Article 2, section 144, of Maine's voter registration law requires a 15-day waiting period to change party enrollment. This would require significant advance planning and commitment. While these actions are theoretically possible, the reality is that in more than 30 other states which have open primaries it hasn't been a problem.

Our democracy would benefit from greater voter participation and from encouraging candidates to appeal to a broader, more centrist group of voters than simply the hard core of their own parties. This would help reduce the extreme political polarization that troubles our democracy now.

In short, I see open primaries as an opportunity to strengthen our democracy, and I hope your committee will advance LD 231.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.