

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

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Good morning Senator Luchini and Representative Caiazzo.

My name is Lane Sturtevant. I'm a resident of South Thomaston. I am testifying in support of LD 231, An Act to Establish Open Primaries.

I'm a proud voter, but I'm also a proud independent voter. So for every primary election, I wrestle with the question of whether I'm willing to sacrifice my independent voter status in order to vote for my preferred candidate. This is a dilemma that many, most even, of my friends face every primary election in Maine. Voters my age, in our twenties and thirties, are far more likely to identify as independents than older voters. According to the Pew Research Center, 44% of Millennials - those born between 1981 and 1996 - call themselves independents, in comparison to 39% of Gen Xers and 32% of Boomers.<sup>1</sup>

And sure, we can always change our party affiliation back to unenrolled after three months. But three months after last July's primary, the pandemic was still raging, and I was weighing whether the trip to the town office to become an independent voter on paper again was worth the risk to my health.

I'm from Vermont. My sister is an independent. My parents are independents. My great-aunt is an independent. Being an independent is not merely a marker of my generation, it is a part of my family heritage, my cultural identity.

My family members in Vermont have never been required to sacrifice their independent voter status in order to vote. They struggle to fathom why I have to. Aren't you more likely to vote for a party candidate in the general election if you're able to vote for that candidate in the primary? They ask. Well, yes, I reply. Aren't you more likely to volunteer for a party candidate's campaign if you're invited to have a say in it as early as the primary? They ask. Well, yes, I reply again. Why do your state's political parties believe that you would vote for their candidates when they shut you out of their primaries? They ask. To that, I can only shrug.

To them, it's common sense to include independents in primaries, because it gets independents more invested in party candidates who might appear on the general election ballot. I wish Maine had an open primary system like Vermont. But I would settle for being able to vote in primaries without having to negate my independence every time.

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/20/1-trends-in-party-affiliation-among-demographic-groups/>