



Testimony in Support of LD 718:

“An Act to Require Municipal Clerks to Issue Absentee Ballots Only to Residents of That Municipality and to Eliminate Ongoing Absentee Voter Status”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 718, which seeks to reinforce election integrity and streamline the absentee voting process by requiring municipal clerks to issue absentee ballots only to residents of their respective municipalities and eliminate ongoing absentee voter status.

Strengthening Election Integrity and Trust

The foundation of a secure and trustworthy electoral system is ensuring that ballots are distributed properly and only to eligible voters. Under current law, municipal clerks may distribute absentee ballots without sufficient residency verification. This creates vulnerabilities that can compromise the integrity of our elections. LD 718 provides a necessary safeguard by ensuring that clerks only issue absentee ballots to those who reside in their municipalities, reducing the risk of improper ballot distribution and fraudulent voting.

Eliminating Ongoing Absentee Voter Status

Maine's ongoing absentee voter status allows voters to automatically receive absentee ballots for every election, even if they move away from a jurisdiction. This well-intended but flawed policy increases the risk of using outdated voter rolls to send ballots to unintended recipients. LD 718 addresses this issue by eliminating ongoing absentee voter status, requiring voters to request an absentee ballot for each election in which they wish to participate. This simple change ensures that absentee ballots are issued based on up-to-date voter information while preserving voter access to absentee voting when needed.

Benefits of LD 718

- **Enhances Election Security** – By restricting absentee ballot issuance to municipal residents, LD 718 prevents misallocation of ballots and reduces risks associated with outdated voter rolls.



- **Increases voter trust** – Over half of voters believe voter fraud through absentee voting is a problem, and reducing the risk of fraud would help address those concerns.¹
- **Improves Administrative Efficiency** – Municipal clerks will have clearer guidelines on absentee ballot issuance, reducing the number of more challenging to count and record absentee ballots as well.²
- **Preserves Voter Accessibility While Reducing Risk** – Voters can still request an absentee ballot for any election, ensuring broad access while preventing ballots from being automatically sent to outdated or incorrect addresses.

A Prudent Step Toward Secure Elections

LD 718 is a reasonable and necessary reform that aligns with best practices for election security while ensuring that voters retain full access to absentee voting. Maine can be a leader in election integrity by implementing policies prioritizing accuracy, accountability, and public trust.

Conclusion

Ensuring fair and transparent elections is fundamental to our democratic process. By supporting LD 718, the Legislature can take meaningful action to improve the security and administration of absentee voting while maintaining accessibility for all Maine voters.

For these reasons, Maine Policy respectfully urges the committee to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 718. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹

<https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2020/09/16/legitimacy-of-voting-by-mail-politicized-leaving-americans-divided/>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/05/20/what-are-arguments-against-voting-by-mail/>