



Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee
Testimony in Support of LD1422
Jeremy Gruber, SVP Open Primaries
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee-

My name is Jeremy Gruber and I am the Senior Vice President of Open Primaries. Open Primaries is a national non-profit organization dedicated to more open and inclusive election systems. We were leaders of the effort to bring semi-open primaries to Maine. Today Maine's close to 300,000 independent voters can now participate in the state's all important first round of elections. But it's now time to go further.

Like the rest of the country, the state of Maine is facing two hard truths-

First- that independents are the fastest growing group of voters in Maine and the country-they are almost a third of Maine voters and already the largest group of voters nationwide. More and more voters are choosing not to affiliate with a party and

Second-for most races the general election is so uncompetitive, oftentimes to the point of being uncontested-that the primary election is the only election that matters.

Yet in Maine, independent and party voters alike remain siloed in partisan primaries that limit choice, artificially reduce competition and as a result lower voter participation. Why should private political parties determine how Maine's voters run their elections? Primaries are taxpayer funded and government administered. They should fully represent the public.

85% of cities and now four states-Alaska, California, Nebraska (for state legislative races) and Washington use nonpartisan primary elections. No longer are voters siloed. Every voter can choose any candidate in any race and all voters participate equally. You've already voted in a nonpartisan primary-it's how most Maine cities run their elections.

In nonpartisan systems, candidates have to reach out to ALL the voters in order to get elected and stay in office. When you're successful in winning an election where you've had to court all voters-you become a better legislator.

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States with nonpartisan primaries are also proving far more immune to the partisan bickering that characterizes so much of our political debates today. They have some of the more productive state legislatures in the country as well.

All the research shows that voter participation goes up in open primaries, but even higher in nonpartisan open primaries. The Bipartisan Policy Center among others issues reports that consistently find that to be the case. When you offer voters real choices at the ballot box, they show up to vote. When less voters get to vote, voting power is distributed unequally.

That's the key to nonpartisan primaries -- empowering voters and elected leaders to work together by removing the structures that keep them apart. Common-sense decision making is in short supply in so many other parts of our country. Nonpartisan primaries help create more space for common sense to flourish.

Nonpartisan primaries will also create real political opportunities for Maine. As my friend David Holt, Mayor of Oklahoma City and Leader of the US Conference of Mayors has said- "Nonpartisan open primary systems foster collaboration and bridge building in the service of finding solutions. Closed systems foster zero-sum game competition and partisan rivalry."

Everyone benefits from a healthier, more inclusive political system that encourages competition. That's why nonpartisan primaries are a solution that enjoys broad, bipartisan support among voters.

I urge you to pass LD1422.

Thank you.

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