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Testimony from:
Dr. Jonathan Madison, Governance Fellow, R Street Institute

Testimony in Support of LD 1422, “AN ACT Regarding Open Primary Elections and Ranked-choice Voting”

April 16, 2025

Joint Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Chairman Hickman, Chairwoman Supica, and members of the committee:

My name is Dr. Jonathan Madison, and I am a governance fellow at the R Street Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy research organization. Our mission is to engage in policy analysis and outreach to promote free markets, and limited, effective government in many areas, including election administration. This is why we have an interest in LD 1422.

This bill makes meaningful strides toward improving Maine’s electoral systems by requiring all candidates for office to compete in a single primary regardless of party affiliation, with the most voted candidates moving on to the general election. Non-partisan primaries are more inclusive of the general electorate and produce more representative results. This election structure encourages candidates to be more civil in their approach to campaigning.¹ Lastly, by advancing the top candidates regardless of partisan affiliation, this approach increases the likelihood that voters will benefit from a competitive race on election day, even in areas where one party is dominant. However, there are areas where the bill can and should be improved to better serve voters.

First, removing presidential elections from ranked choice voting (RCV) is a step backward. Maine has been a national leader in adopting RCV.² Eliminating RCV for presidential races would be a regression that goes against the opinion of a majority of the state’s voters.³ Second, adopting a top-two system for some races while using a top-four system for others would create confusion among voters and administrative complexity. Our research shows that top-four systems offer several advantages over top-two; they give voters more choices with greater political diversity, reduce vote splitting, and often result

¹ Williamson, Ryan. “Evaluating the Effects of the Top-Four System in Alaska.” R Street Institute, January 31, 2023. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/evaluating-the-effects-of-the-top-four-system-in-alaska/>.

² Germer, Matt. “An Analysis of Ranked Choice Voting in Maine.” R Street Institute, September 21, 2021. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/an-analysis-of-ranked-choice-voting-in-maine/>.

³ Mantell, Will. “New Ranked Choice Poll in Maine: Harris Leads Statewide and in 1st District, Trump Leads in 2nd District.” FairVote. Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://fairvote.org/press/maine-poll-oct2024/>.

in more broadly supported candidates.⁴ A consistent approach across all elections would streamline the process.

With these changes, this legislation would constitute a significant and comprehensive reform of Maine's electoral system that would make elections more competitive and representative. For these reasons, we encourage your support and passage of LD 1422, with the suggested improvements.

Thank you,

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⁴ Germer, Matt. "The Two Top Ways to Improve Top-Two Elections." R Street Institute. Accessed April 10, 2025. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/the-two-top-ways-to-improve-top-two-elections/>.