

Barbara Smith Warner
National Vote at Home Institute
LD 1149

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to LD 1149. My name is Barbara Smith Warner, and I am the executive director of the National Vote at Home Institute.

We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to increase voters' access to, use of, and confidence in voting at home with mailed out paper ballots. Since 2018, we have helped policymakers and election administrators across the country better implement Vote at Home systems by providing best practices on policy, research and communications.

In addition to my official role, I am testifying today as both a resident of Oregon, where we created the first vote at home system and have used it successfully for twenty five years, and as a former legislator who served in the Oregon House from 2014-2022.

Starting with our civil war soldiers, Americans have utilized some form of mail in voting for over 100 years, and it is available in all 50 states, although state laws dictate how easy or difficult the process is for voters. Currently 8 states and the District of Columbia have embraced a Universal Vote at Home system, where every eligible voter is automatically mailed a ballot for every election. Maine has been a leader in voting access for years, including its increased access to absentee ballots over the last decade. In the 2026 elections, Maine will be one of ten states that allow voters to sign up once and then automatically receive their absentee ballot for every election. LD 1149 will eliminate that right, which will make it harder for voters and more expensive for elections officials and administrators.

Recent research across multiple states into how many absentee voters request ballots every year showed that about 50% of those who Vote at Home are “repeaters”, voters who sign up every year, and in Maine the number was even higher, at 66%. LD1149 will eliminate the time and cost savings of permanent absentee voting for both voters and election administrators.

Voting at home with absentee ballots also makes a significant difference in turnout. States that sent every voter a ballot in the 2024 primary election had a turnout rate that was more than twice that of states that did not. But the numbers are striking as well in states that allow voters to request ballots for any reason - in the 2022 general election, the turnout among the 20.1 million voters who requested and received absentee ballots was 81%, while turnout for the 88.2 million who voted at polling places was only 50%. And disabled voters are particularly impacted. Research conducted by the US Election Assistance Commission and Rutgers University showed that states providing easier access to absentee voting between 2018 and 2022 had significantly higher turnout increases among people with disabilities.

Voting at home with absentee ballots has multiple safety elements, from paper ballots and signature verification to bar codes that tie each ballot to an individual voter. Even the Heritage Foundation's voting fraud database shows no difference in fraud rates for states with low mailed-out ballot use versus high mailed-out ballot use, with vanishingly small numbers overall.

LD1149 attacks many other key elements of Maine's absentee ballot system, from limiting the number of ballot boxes and prohibiting postage paid ballots to prohibiting close family members from requesting or returning ballots for their parents, grandparents or children.

Mainers treasure their right to vote at home. Please protect that right instead of falling prey to the forces that are attacking voting rights. The National Vote at Home Institute strongly opposes LD1149, which would rollback Maine voters' access to absentee ballots. I am happy to take any questions. Thank you.