



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini
The Honorable John Schneck, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 6, 2019

RE: LD 272 An Act to Allow Voting by Mail

My name is Penelope Hamblin. I'm a resident of South Portland. I am representing members of the League of Women Voters of Maine.

The League is a nonpartisan, consensus-driven organization. Since we do not yet have a consensus position on voting by mail, I am testifying neither for nor against LD 272.

Switching from our current election system to voting by mail has the potential to bring significant benefits. One is convenience to voters, especially in sparsely populated areas of northern Maine. Another would be the potential for cost savings if all ballots were mailed to a central counting facility. This could also provide logistical benefits for counting ranked choice voting contests.

These potential benefits are by no means guaranteed. Maine's no-excuse absentee voting system already provides citizens with the option of voting from the comfort of their own home. Adding permanent absentee voter status could enhance this provision. There's also a financial tradeoff: the cost of running polling places might be lower, but the cost of ballot management would likely increase.

Maine has a unique political culture, and it's important to take that into consideration.

We allow same-day voter registration. Long lines to register on Election Day tell us that voters want and need to be able to register up to the last minute. Any vote-by-mail process should include the option of visiting a center where voters can register and vote in person. But this would look more like what we've already got: no-excuse absentee voting. Or perhaps the convenience that voters want could be provided by early voting,

which we will support later this session. In fact, some election experts recommend early voting over vote-by-mail for ballot security reasons.¹

Going to the polls is an important act of civic engagement for many voters. Balanced against this beloved tradition is the need for modernization, efficiency, and improved security. With regard to LD 272, we believe that it's essential to consider the following questions:

Since our Constitution provides that the election officials of the towns and cities shall sort, count and declare the votes, can voting by mail be enacted without a constitutional amendment?

How would a 100 percent voting by mail system affect and be affected by other election reforms currently under consideration?

Is the proposed timeline realistic? No state has attempted to implement a full vote-by-mail system in a little more than a year.

We support the establishment of a study committee on this issue rather than an implementation commission as proposed in the bill. We believe that election officials, voters, and voting rights advocates should be included, and that the decision on WHETHER to pursue this policy should await further examination. The League would welcome the opportunity to participate in such a study.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I'd be glad to answer any questions.

¹ Rick Hasen, "How Democrats Should Reform Elections in the States," American Prospect, January 22, 2019, <https://prospect.org/article/how-democrats-should-reform-elections-states>