



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable John Atwood, Chair
Members of the Commission to Study the Conduct of Elections in Maine

FROM: Barbara McDade, President, League of Women Voters of Maine
Sarah Walton, Director, League of Women Voters of Maine

DATE: August 28, 2012

Thank you for your question of August 23, 2012, posed by Commissioner Willey to Sarah Walton, regarding the League's position on polling place consolidation. This memo is in response.

The League of Women Voters does not have a state-wide or national position on polling place consolidation. We believe these decisions are best made at the community level. Some factors to consider in favor of consolidation include the following:

- Better supervision of activities inside and outside the polling location by town clerks
- Potential for cost savings
- Uniform, better-quality equipment and procedures
- Better-trained staff, need for fewer staff
- Better handicap access
- Better, more efficient organization and set-up of the polling location
- Reduction in voters redirected to another polling place, either because they moved within the district or for other reasons

Some factors to consider against consolidation include the following:

- Loss of sense of community
- Loss of personal recognition between prospective voters and election officials
- Potential for lower voter participation
- Concentration of candidate activity at a single location – exacerbates the run-the-gauntlet experience for voters

We believe that when communities make the decision to consolidate, they must also make an investment in encouraging voter participation.

The City of Bangor has had experience consolidating polling places. We have only anecdotal evidence of the success of this program.

- People did prefer to be able to walk to their polling place.
- They miss the sense of community from being in a smaller group where they know people and are known.
- They now encounter a more concentrated phalanx of candidates as they enter the polling place.
- People say they can vote faster without as much ado at the consolidated poll. They get through faster.
- They do still see many people they know.
- The polling place seems to be more efficiently managed and better arranged. Everything seems well organized with lots of good signs explaining things and clear directions about where to go for what help. It's easy to see where to register to vote if you aren't registered. It's easy to see where to go to get help if you need it. It's easy to see how to get a new ballot if you made a mistake on your first one; and it's easy to see where you put the ballot when you are finished marking it. This was not always the case when voting was at the local stations.
- We are not aware that Bangor has experienced lower voter participation with consolidated polling places.
- We do know that Bangor has taken aggressive measures to make voting more convenient and accessible:
 - Free transportation to the polls on the Bangor city bus
 - Week-long "early voting" with extended hours either through true early voting pilot programs or through convenient in-person absentee voting.

Thank you for your interest in this matter. We hope you find this memorandum helpful in your deliberations.