



# 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

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I am Anne Schink, resident of South Portland and member of the League of Women Voters of the Portland area. I serve on the National Board of the League of Women Voters. Today I am here to talk about the voter registration and elections system in the state of Maine. We applaud your interest in conducting a thorough review of election practices in the state. I am certain that we all agree that as the leading democracy in the world, our voting system should be free, fair and accessible to all eligible American. Our country was founded on the principle that all are “created equal.” Living up to this promise – providing all citizens the same opportunities and freedoms – means it is wrong to pass laws that block some eligible Americans from voting and being equal participants in our precious democracy. No doubt you have been able to confirm what many of us already know—while there is always room for improvement, our electoral system in Maine is for the most part free, fair and accessible to all. This upholds the founding tenets our nation and is a source of pride for our great state.

As a longtime member of the League of Women Voters here in Maine and in Pennsylvania, I have observed the ways that access to the ballot box have changed over the course of my adult life. Of course, the League of Women Voters has its roots in the struggle for women’s suffrage starting 150 years ago and ending in 1920. At that time, women thought their struggle was over. But they soon realized that it would be a long fight educating these newly enfranchised women about how to use their votes to bring about social change that was dear to them. Through the civil rights era and the Voting Rights Act that opened the ballot to members of the African American community, to the Motor Voter legislation that required public agencies to provide voter registration materials, to the Help America Vote Act that brought consistency to federal election practices across the country—all these remarkable achievements have aimed to open access to voting to all Americans. We can see that through this legislation politicians in the past worked to ensure free, fair and accessible elections to all eligible citizens but today we see that there are some politicians that want to manipulate election laws for their own personal political gain. Let us not go down that new path but continue to forge a path forward, one that embraces all eligible voters and allows them to fulfill their most basic civic duty – the responsibility to vote.

In Portland, our League members have been participants in the Naturalization Ceremonies where immigrants become citizens of the United States. The solemn oath they take to become citizens emphasizes the seriousness of their decision. We provide them with voter registration cards so that they will be sure to register and vote in their local community. We welcome them to the community, where many of them have lived for many years. The excitement of these new citizens about their ability to vote is palpable to all in attendance. Their pride in their accomplishment is a moving experience for everyone who attends these ceremonies. This is the spirit we want to encourage for all those who desire to participate in the American form of democracy.

So the recent efforts in some quarters to tighten restrictions and limit access to registering and voting fly in the face of everything that the League of Women Voters has supported for the past 92 years. Maine is recognized as a national leader in voter participation, voter transparency, fairness, and equity in election administration and ranks high in every measure of voter access by groups who monitor such matters.

Let me tell you a personal story. I confess that I was one of those who initially thought that requiring a photo ID wasn't all that bad, since 'everyone' has a photo ID of some sort. That was before my adult daughter moved to Maine. She is a young woman with some disabilities and low vision that would prevent her from driving. One of the first things I did for her was to make sure she obtained a photo ID. That involved taking her to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles during regular business hours, waiting for an hour and a half, producing her birth certificate which cost \$50 to obtain from another state, showing evidence of her place of residence, and paying the \$14 fee. However, not everyone is fortunate enough to have someone like their mother to shepherd them through the process of obtaining a photo ID. She could have taken the bus, but not all DMV offices are accessible by public transportation. If she or I had had regular weekday paid employment, she would not have been able to get to the DMV offices when they were open. She probably would not have had the approximately \$75 required to produce the paperwork she required. Each of these steps is a barrier to participation in public life.

When she went to register to vote, her experience at the City Clerk's office in South Portland where she lives was a sharp contrast to her experience at the DMV. She was welcomed by the staff at the City Clerk's office as a new resident of South Portland, asked about her new home, asked for proof that she was now living in South Portland, and given information about how to register to vote. Her questions were answered, and the process was completed in a very reasonable amount of time. For the first time, I think she began to understand what it was her mother did in working with others to protect the voting rights of all citizens. For the first time, she understood the right of every citizen to vote and the responsibilities associated with that right.

I, on the other hand, began to see why the restrictions under consideration with Voter ID placed undue burdens on many targeted segments our community – including those who have every right to vote. Indeed it appears that some politicians are creating new laws for their own personal gain. Restricting access to the voter registration and election process goes against the American dream and the American way of life. Maine has no history of voter impersonation the only issue that voter photo ID would address. Our clerks and other election workers are public servants of the highest order who subscribe to a strong code of ethics, who receive training in how to protect our voting systems, and who diligently serve in the public interest. We know and respect them. Our communities and neighborhood polling places are small enough that most of us know each other or at least some of our neighbors. The issues documented in other large cities just do not apply here. Many Maine citizens still enjoy the excitement of physically appearing in the polling place on Election Day because it is such a powerful symbol of what is right with our country. It is all conducted out in the open for all to see, examine, challenge and support.

We can all agree that it is important to protect the integrity of our elections and we recognize that citizens are concerned about voter fraud. But we should not be making it harder for thousands of our fellow citizens to participate in our democracy. It is important to stop voter fraud of all kinds. That includes laws that make it harder millions of Americans to vote.

Like the repeal of Election Day registration, enacting a Voter ID requirement will surely create barriers and ultimately limit access to the voting booth to the most vulnerable in our society—the elderly, those with disabilities, minorities, the poor without access to transportation or who cannot leave their jobs during the hours when municipal offices are open. This smacks of the most unfortunate form of callous discrimination that has no place in Maine. We would be creating a system where politicians pick their voters not where voters pick their representative.

Here in Maine we take great pride in the fact that we have one of the highest voter turnout rates in the country. In large part, we know that is because we have same-day voter registration. We are pleased that this tradition will continue. Part of being the leading democracy in the world is making participation free, fair and accessible. Creating barriers through restrictive registration and voting practices is no way “to promote informed and active participation of citizens in government”—which is the very purpose of the League of Women Voters.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about these important issues.