



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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To: Senator Nancy B. Sullivan, Senate Chair  
Representative Pamela Jabar Trinward, House Chair  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

From: Michelle A. Small, League of Women Voters of Maine

Re: Testimony in Favor of LD 1169, An Act to Amend the Election Laws

Date: April 6, 2009

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My name is Michelle Small, and I live in Brunswick. I am the volunteer Treasurer of the League of Women Voters of Maine and a member of the League's all-volunteer lobby corps. The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan organization where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement. I am here today to testify in Favor of LD 1169, An Act to Amend the Election Laws.

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. Access to the ballot is an integral part of ensuring both a representative government and the right of every citizen to vote. The League's grassroots campaign to secure national legislation to expand voter registration helped secure the passage of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. Following the exposure of election administration anomalies in 2000, the League and its coalition partners also lobbied tirelessly to ensure enactment of the Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Despite these reforms, a study conducted by the Cooperative Congressional Election Survey in October and November and released in March found that as many as three million eligible voters did not vote because they encountered registration issues or did not receive an absentee ballot; an additional two to four million registered voters were discouraged from voting due to long lines and voter identification requirements; and nine million were not registered due to residency rules or registration deadlines. Harvard Political Science Professor Stephen Ansolabehere, the study's lead author, who testified about its findings before the U.S. Senate Rules Committee, concluded, "Registration issues were for 2008 what machine problems were for the 2000 election."

While the League of Women Voters of Maine recognizes that many of its sister leagues in other states face far greater challenges in the area of voting rights, it believes that the State of Maine can make improvements in voter registration procedures and election administration.

Some voters are without a traditional home, and some voters are without a traditional form of identification. These voters disproportionately tend to be disabled, have low socioeconomic status, or be members of minority groups. Therefore, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports the provisions of this bill that make clear that registrars are allowed to consider the weight of all factors in determining the residence of an eligible voter. The League also supports the provisions of this bill that specify that registrars are allowed to accept documents without photographs as proof of identity.

Because it is clear that problems registering to vote and obtaining absentee ballots discourages eligible voters from casting their ballots, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports the following provisions of this law that would make registering and obtaining absentee ballots easier: prohibiting the removal of a voter who has moved to another state from a voter list within 60 days of a presidential election unless the registrar has received confirmation of the voter's registration in another state; affirming the right of a citizen who has never resided in the United States to claim the Maine voting residence of either parent; extending the registration and enrollment period before party caucuses during presidential election years to one hour; requiring the registrar to register and/or enroll all eligible voters who are present at the end of the registration period.

The League of Women Voters of Maine was disturbed by the quantity of credible testimony given at the hearing on LD 547, An Act to Amend the Laws Concerning Write-in Candidates for Elected Office To Increase Fairness, that votes for write-in candidates were not reported in 2008. For that reason, the League favors the provisions of this bill that remove the requirement that a candidate's residence be listed on the ballot, that add a requirement for posting the list of declared write-in candidates next to the sample ballot, and that specify the procedures for counting of ballots by election clerks. Although stickers have not worked well as a voting technique in past elections, the League asks the Secretary of State to organize a pilot program to test the use of high quality stickers in optical scanners.