



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Garrett P. Mason
The Honorable Representative Louis J. Luchini, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: April 18, 2017

RE: LD 1232 An Act To Require the Secretary of State to Automatically Register
Nonregistered Persons Who Are Qualified to Vote through Records of the
Bureau of Motor Vehicles

Good morning. My name is Ann Luther. I'm a resident of Trenton. I am here today as a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve on its Advocacy Committee. The League of Women Voters of Maine submits the following testimony in support of LD 1232 An Act To Require the Secretary of State to Automatically Register Nonregistered Persons Who Are Qualified to Vote through Records of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.

The League of Women Voters of Maine, together with our national affiliate and sister Leagues across the country, support new mechanisms to assist in voter registration, including automatic voter registration (AVR). The League of Women Voters of Oregon, California, Alaska, and Connecticut were part of the coalitions driving AVR forward in their states, paying close attention to bill language to ensure that the new systems of registration did not negatively impact underrepresented communities. We support provisions and safeguards to ensure that all eligible Americans can participate in AVR and that those who are not eligible to vote are not wrongly brought into the system by government action.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is a process being adopted by states around the country to modernize their current paper-based systems with systems that use electronic government data to identify and register eligible Americans to vote. AVR also uses the same data to actively update voter registration information when people indicate a change of address to participating agencies. This bill proposes to digitize voter registration transactions and shift from an "opt in" system to an "opt out." When eligible citizens give information to qualified agencies, they are automatically signed up to vote unless they choose to opt out. AVR helps ensure that once citizens are signed up, they remain registered when they move within the state.

Maine has been at the forefront of voter participation for over almost two generations, but according to a report by the Pew Center on the States, “Voter registration in the United States largely reflects its 19th- origins and has not kept pace with advancing technology and a mobile society.”¹ While we do not underestimate the careful planning, design, and training required under this bill to bring us into the 21st century, we want Maine to continue to be a leader in adopting these modernizations.

As you have heard from the League of Women Voters before, we are committed to engaging all Maine people in the process of electing our leaders and encouraging all eligible voters to participate in the electoral process. The first step toward participation in elections is registering to vote. Automatic Voter Registration will make it easier for many eligible Maine citizens to take that first step – to get registered to vote. This one improvement will make registering easier for Maine people, will reduce the potential for errors in the voting rolls, and will ultimately save money and time at all levels of the election process.

We encourage you to support LD 1232 An Act To Require the Secretary of State to Automatically Register Nonregistered Persons Who Are Qualified to Vote through Records of the Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ The Pew Center on the States in a report entitled “Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient” dated February 2012. <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2012/02/14/inaccurate-costly-and-inefficient-evidence-that-americas-voter-registration-system-needs-an-upgrade>, accessed April 15, 2017.