



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Scott Cyrway
The Honorable Representative Louis Luchini, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: January 25, 2016

RE: LD 1539 - An Act To Expand the Early Processing of Absentee Ballots

My name is Polly Ward. I am a member of the Advocacy Committee for the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am a resident of South Freeport. I am here today as a volunteer in support of LD 1539, which would permit municipal clerks to process absentee ballots on the Friday, Saturday, and/or Monday before the election, as long as the procedures in Title 21-A MRSA, §760-B are followed.

The League of Women Voters believes that voting is a fundamental right of citizenship, and we have been working for more than ninety-five years to defend and protect that right. We also support measures that provide for the smooth conduct of elections, improve the professional administration of the election process, and insure that our elections in Maine are free from operational errors.

Current law permits municipal clerks to process absentee ballots on the day immediately prior to Election Day. On the Monday before Election Day, clerks are performing numerous duties essential to getting the polls ready for voters. These duties do not provide enough time to process the increasing volume of absentee ballots. Some municipalities have 45% or more of their ballots cast absentee. This volume of absentee ballots cannot be processed on Election Day alone. Permitting clerks to process absentee ballots on Friday and/or Saturday, if they choose, will enable them to use Monday to set up and prepare for Election Day.

We support this bill as it will provide some relief to election officials in the days prior to the election. It is consistent with our commitment to the smooth conduct of elections and to insuring that Maine's elections are free of operational errors. However, we continue to believe that true early voting, where the voters complete a ballot and put it directly into the ballot box or scanning machine on the day they vote early would be the most efficient method to making voting convenient to the large number of absentee voters and to reducing the potential for overload on our election officials.

We encourage you to support LD 1539. This change to the absentee voting procedures will permit additional time for election officials to prepare for the Election Day.