



# LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

PO Box 863  
Augusta, ME 04332-0863

(207) 622-0256  
lwvme@gwi.net

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

DATE: March 10, 2015

RE: An Act To Facilitate the Timely Return of Requested Absentee Ballots

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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 offer testimony neither for nor against LD 509, which would provide return postage at no cost to voters using absentee ballots.

We would like to thank Rep. Schneck for bringing this bill forward. We understand that the intent is to make sure that no voter faces a cost obstacle, no matter how nominal, in casting their ballot.

Under current law, UACAVA voters are entitled to free postage when returning ballots by mail in federal elections as long as they are mailed from a designated foreign location – embassy or military base, etc. In addition, under federal law,

... Absentee balloting materials with insufficient or missing postage are never to be detained or treated as unpaid mail, as directed by POM section 171.3. Shortpaid and unpaid absentee balloting materials must never be returned to the voter for additional postage. The materials must be delivered to election officials, and postage due must be requested.<sup>1</sup>

We are uncertain how widely known it is that these ballots mailed with whatever postage would be delivered anyway, postage due. In our informal survey – admittedly, with a very small sample size -- it emerged that even postal officials might not be uniformly aware of this requirement.

Still, if there were evidence that this measure would improve voter participation, the League would be testifying in support. We could not find that evidence. According to a 2008 study commissioned by the Election Assistance Commission, the impact of free postage would be quite costly, without having a clear or significant impact on voter participation. Most likely effected would be the housebound and disabled, who have

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<sup>1</sup> USPS Postal Bulletin, “Be Ready for Election 2010,” [http://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2010/pb22296/html/info\\_007.htm](http://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2010/pb22296/html/info_007.htm).

trouble making it to the Post Office to acquire the specific postage needed for the absentee ballot mailing. However, to quote from the report, it is not clear that even among this group, there would be a measurable increase in voter participation:

... EAC's research did not show that such a program would yield the results Congress seeks among the elderly and individual with disabilities. The study's survey results indicate that such a program, while perhaps convenient, would not increase their likelihood of voting, as large majorities of each group stated that they would still vote by mail even without the benefit of having free postage.<sup>2</sup>

Other studies confirm these findings.<sup>3</sup>

We support the aspirations of this bill but conclude that it would not be cost effective. If the funds were available, they might be better spent on other voter outreach and education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ann Luther  
Advocacy Chair  
League of Women Voters of Maine

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<sup>2</sup> EAC memo, September 7, 2010, <http://www.eac.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Absentee%20Postage%20-%20EAC%20Summary%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> "The Effect of Prepaid Postage on Turnout: A Cautionary Tale for Election Administrators," Election Law Journal, Volume 11, No. 3, 2012, [http://www.columbia.edu/~ajc2241/final\\_stamp.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/~ajc2241/final_stamp.pdf)