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To: Honorable Senator Douglas Thomas
Honorable Representative David Cotta
The Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

From: League of Women Voters of Maine

Re: LD 607, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Require the Governor To Be Elected by a Majority Vote

Date: March 9, 2011

My name is Michelle Small, and I live in Brunswick. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Maine, and I am here as a volunteer to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 607, RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Require the Governor To Be Elected by a Majority Vote.

The League of Women Voters of the United States, a nonpartisan political organization with 50 state Leagues and more than 800 local Leagues, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Following years of study and discussion, the League of Women Voters of Maine recently reached concurrence with the League of Women Voters of Minnesota in favor of Instant Runoff Voting, sometimes known as Ranked Choice Voting. Based on that position, the League endorses the election of candidates in single seat elections by a majority vote, if achieved through Instant Runoff Voting.

Plurality voting, in which the candidate with the most votes wins, can be dysfunctional when more than two candidates run. Instant Runoff Voting, on the other hand, encourages candidates to reach out to more people, alleviates concerns about the "spoiler effect" and guarantees the election of candidates who have majority support.

Our members believe that the winner of single seat elections should be determined by a majority vote, and we support a system of Instant Runoff Voting (or Ranked Choice Voting) to determine the majority winner. However, the League does not agree that the majority winner should be determined by a traditional run-off election between the top two candidates in the first-round election.

While there was strong support among League members for determining the winner of an election by a majority vote, that support diminished if the winner were to be determined by a traditional run-off election. Some of the factors driving that view included: expense to the state, extension of the campaign season, driving up the cost of campaign financing, loss of civility during the runoff, danger of strategic voting during the original election, and significant reduction in voter engagement and turnout in traditional runoff elections.