



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

League of Women Voters Disappointed by Loss of Same-Day Registration

For Immediate Release

Contact: Michelle A. Small, 729-1856, msmall@zwi.net

Augusta, ME – The League of Women Voters expressed disappointment that the Legislature voted this week to curtail the public’s voting rights. By a vote of 18 to 17, the Senate eliminated same-day voter registration and moved the deadline for registering and submitting absentee ballots back to the third business day prior to Election Day. The vote in the House of Representatives was 74 to 70.

Based on information acquired from the Secretary of State, the League is concerned that this drastic change in the law has the potential to disenfranchise tens of thousands of voters. In 2008, more than 55,000 voters registered to vote in the days leading up to the election. In 2010, more than 19,000 voters did.

A number of groups will be adversely affected by this change. Among them are the following: the elderly who have moved from their homes into retirement facilities; working parents; students who travel home from college to vote; people who have moved during the past year; and first-time voters.

Same-day registration was enacted by a Republican-led Legislature in 1973. In the year before the law was enacted, Maine ranked 21st among the states in voter turnout. By 2000, Maine ranked 3rd and has continued to rank 3rd – only behind Minnesota and Wisconsin, which also have same-day registration.

One purpose cited for eliminating Election Day registration is to prevent voter fraud. However, fraud is extremely rare. The League is aware of only two cases of voter fraud that Maine’s Attorney General has prosecuted in the last several decades. This is a drastic solution to a virtually non-existent problem.

The League believes that this legislation is a giant step in the wrong direction. Maine should be proud of its tradition of high voter turnout. It indicates that a wide cross-section of the state’s eligible voters is involved in choosing leaders and deciding issues. This level of civic engagement is admirable in the 21st century.

#####