



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman  
The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 6, 2023

RE: LD 26 - An Act to Provide Postage Prepaid Return Envelopes to Voters Who Send  
Absentee Ballots by Mail

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Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs.

My name is Will Hayward. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as Advocacy Program Coordinator on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. While we thank the sponsor for bringing forward this pro-voter proposal, I am testifying Neither for Nor Against LD 26.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working for over 100 years to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate.

The League has a long history of advocating for voting rights and removing barriers to voting. For some voters, acquiring a postage stamp can be a barrier to voting. Disabled people, people without cars, or those lacking sufficient income to procure stamps may be hampered by having to return their ballots to a drop box or in-person, rather than mailed in. It seems reasonable that, by removing the barrier of finding a stamp, prepaid postage might increase voter participation. While postal regulations currently guarantee delivery of unstamped ballot envelopes (postage due), most voters aren't aware of this, and anecdotal evidence suggests that not many people take advantage of it.

Increasingly voters in Maine and the U.S. are casting their ballots by mail. In the 2022 election, about 36 percent of voters in Maine voted by absentee ballots. Ballots are returned to municipalities either through the US Postal Service, in person at town and city offices, or dropped into designated ballot drop boxes. Drop boxes are a relatively new option, and we suspect that many ballots that might have been mailed previously are now delivered to a drop box, so the percentage of mail ballots may be declining.

Many states provide prepaid postage or guaranteed return postage for mail-in ballots. According to the Brennan Center for Justice: "Prior to the pandemic, 14 states, by law, provided prepaid postage on ballot envelopes for all statewide elections. Two additional states — Virginia and Massachusetts — amended their laws in 2020 to provide prepaid postage for all absentee ballots going forward. A number of other states and localities voluntarily included prepaid postage on absentee ballot envelopes during the 2020

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primaries even though they were not required to do so by law.”<sup>1</sup>

Most states that provide prepaid postage use the Business Reply Mail (BRM)<sup>2</sup> system, where postage is only charged to the permit holder when a ballot is returned by mail.<sup>3</sup> A permit is required to use BRM. Sub-permits connected to the BRM permit are possible, although in the past, there has been some question about whether Maine’s 500 municipalities could participate under a permit owned by the State. Usually states reimburse counties or municipalities for postage. In Maine, the absentee ballot envelopes may contain both state and local ballots and may vary by weight and postage due.

However the data on whether pre-paid postage increases voter turnout overall is inconclusive. One jurisdiction, King County in Washington, implemented prepaid postage and saw a bump in their voter turnout from 38% in 2016 to 43% in 2018.<sup>4</sup> But a 2007 national survey of voters done by the Election Center, with input from voter groups, the Postal Service, and election organizations concluded: “While voters conclude that free or reduced postage may increase voter participation, the overwhelming majority of voters conclude that it would have little influence on their decision to return a ballot or to vote.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, people who vote anyway would like to have the option of paid postage. While it seems plausible that paid postage might shift voting patterns from in-person to absentee, increasing the number of absentee ballots is not necessarily a benefit in Maine, where those ballots are more labor intensive to process.

We are acutely aware of investments needed to modernize our elections infrastructure, from staffing to technology. The League supports efforts to remove barriers to voting, and we support efforts that increase voter participation. Prepaid postage may help certain people return their ballots, but given the fact that it may not produce substantial gains in voter turnout, and will incur a significant cost to the State, the League of Women Voters is neither for nor against this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Center for Justice, *Mail Voting, What Has Changed in 2020*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/mail-voting-what-has-changed-2020>

<sup>2</sup> [https://pe.usps.com/qsg\\_archive/pdf/qsg\\_archive\\_20060108/qsg300/q507a.pdf](https://pe.usps.com/qsg_archive/pdf/qsg_archive_20060108/qsg300/q507a.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> National Conference of State Legislators, <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/table-12-states-with-postage-paid-election-mail>

<sup>4</sup> Election Connection, *Kings County Elections*, September 9, 2018, by K. Hosh, <https://kcelections.com/category/prepaid-postage/>

<sup>5</sup> *Report On The Feasibility And Advisability Of Providing Free Or Reduced Postage For The Return Of Voted Absentee Ballots* February 7, 2008 – Testimony Before The United States Elections Assistance Commission, Ernest Hawkins, Consulting Director for The Election Center [https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/event\\_document/files/testimony%20ernie%20hawkins%20public%20meeting%20february%207%202008.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/event_document/files/testimony%20ernie%20hawkins%20public%20meeting%20february%207%202008.pdf)