



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

DATE: April 5, 2023

RE: LD 1255 - An Act to Improve the Security of Voting Places

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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 the Advocacy Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in support of LD 1255.

We believe that the right to vote is sacred and must be protected. Voters must be able to cast their ballots, and election workers must be able to perform their duties, freely and without fear. Federal and Maine law make it illegal to intimidate or interfere with voters or election officials.

We are dismayed by reports of rising threats against election workers and voter intimidation tactics. Thankfully, there have been very few incidents in Maine, but threats have happened even here.<sup>1</sup>

LD 1255 is a timely and reasonable response to concerns about safety at the polls. It simply requires that owners keep their dangerous weapons locked in their vehicles while they are in or near voting places. Failure to comply is a civil violation and carries no criminal penalty. This modest bill takes a small but important step by protecting voters and election workers from intimidation through the display of dangerous weapons, and from fear of harm by accidental or — God forbid -- intentional use of a knife, firearm, or other weapon.

We should all be able to agree that there are places where dangerous weapons should be prohibited. Everyone in this room had to pass through a security check. You can't take a dangerous weapon into the place where Maine's laws are made. Places where citizens are voting deserve the same protection. A U.S. Supreme Court decision acknowledged this in a ruling that's relevant to your consideration of LD 1255. In June 2022, in *New York State Rifle and Pistol Association v. Bruen*, the Court struck down a New York law that required showing proper cause in order to carry a concealed firearm in a public place. But that ruling had a silver lining: the court's decision did *not* overturn the so-called "sensitive-places doctrine," which allows banning firearms in sensitive places such as schools and public buildings. According to this

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<sup>1</sup>Pegues, Jeff. "Unusual levels of threats to election workers persist in 7 states." CBS News, October 3, 2022. <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/unusual-levels-of-threats-to-election-workers-persist-in-7-states/ar-AA12yM8D>

ruling, banning firearms in sensitive places is not unconstitutional. The League of Women Voters filed a brief in this case arguing that voting places should be considered "sensitive places," and the court agreed.<sup>2</sup>

In its Amicus brief, the League stated that the right to vote is meaningless without the right to vote safely. We urge you all to take a step forward in protecting our voters and our election workers by voting Ought to Pass on LD 1255.

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

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<sup>2</sup> League of Women Voters of the US, "Understanding the Supreme Court's Gun Control Decision in NYSRPA v. Bruen." July 12, 2022.  
<https://www.lwv.org/blog/understanding-supreme-courts-gun-control-decision-nysrpa-v-bruen>