



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

DATE: April 26, 2023

RE: LD 1690 – An Act Regarding Ongoing Absentee Voting and Tracking of Absentee Ballots

Good morning Senator Hickman and Representative Supica.

My name is Will Hayward. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Advocacy Program Coordinator on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in support on LD 1690.

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.

Ongoing absentee voting is a forward-thinking election policy that improves access and increases turnout. Ongoing absentee status offers voters a system in which ballots are automatically delivered to requesting voters before every election. Participants don't need to fill out an application every time, and receiving the ballot can be a helpful reminder to the voter of an upcoming election. Voters can stay on the list as long as they are an active voter and request to be removed at any time.

Ongoing absentee ballots particularly serve Maine voters who face competing priorities and additional obstacles, including voters with limited means, bilingual households, voters with disabilities, and voters, often elderly citizens, who live alone. In 2021, the Legislature took the first step in bringing this policy to Maine by funding LD 148 in the budget, allowing voters over 65 or self-declaring as having a disability to apply for ongoing absentee status. By expanding ongoing absentee voting to all voters, there will be equal access to this pro-voter measure, which will benefit many other voters facing challenges. According to the National Vote at Home Institute, 66% of absentee voters in Maine are repeat absentee voters. Implementing full ongoing absentee voting will make each election more convenient for many of these voters.

In addition to its benefits for individual voters, LD 1690 also has the opportunity to broadly increase turnout, particularly in local and special elections. Across the state, we uniformly see drastically lower turnout in elections that do not coincide with a statewide election. With ongoing absentee voting, the voters who have requested to receive ballots automatically will be invited to participate in those elections by receiving a ballot in the mail; this will encourage increased participation in these elections.

Across the country, ongoing absentee voting is an increasingly popular proposal. States such as Montana and Arizona have offered this service for well over a decade, and several states have adopted the measure as voters have increasingly embraced absentee voting since 2020. It is time for Maine to join the states fully embracing this pro-voter measure. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1690.

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