



TO: The Honorable Senator Peggy Rotundo
The Honorable Representative Melanie Sachs, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

The Honorable Senator Craig Hickman Co-Chair
The Honorable Laura Supica Co-Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 23, 2024

RE: LD 2214 Supplemental Budget Bill – Office of the Secretary of State
LD 577 An Act to Increase Availability of Election Information on Local Government Websites

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Hickman, and Representative Supica.

My name is Will Hayward. I am here today as the Advocacy Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying with respect to the portion of LD 2214 concerning the budget for the Secretary of State.

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.

We urge you to support the additional positions for the Secretary of State included in the supplemental budget, and to include funding for LD 577, An Act to Increase Availability of Election Information on Local Government Websites, carried over from the first session, awaiting final action on the Special Appropriations Table.

LD 2214

The State's election administration functions have been chronically under-resourced for many years. What was adequate resourcing 25 years ago is no longer adequate today. The field of elections administration is not what it was then. The technology has changed, the political pressures have changed, the cyber and other threats have changed. The level of expertise required to perform these functions has changed. We must respond to this changing landscape with additional resources if we hope to remain a national leader in election administration. We encourage full funding of this initiative and encourage the Legislature to consider additional funding for the Elections Division.

In particular, we wish to highlight the importance of the proposed funding for staffing and software to

facilitate Freedom of Access Act requests and track public records requests. As an organization committed to strong elections and data-driven policymaking, we believe this funding improves both of these objectives. Improving the office's ability to respond to and share these requests will improve public information that informs the policies we advocate for and increase the office's capacity to administer crucial upcoming elections. Funding this work as proposed on page A-128 of the budget will strengthen important public functions of the Elections Division.

LD 577

As part of our work in the public interest, the League works with Mainers all over the state, helping them engage in self-governance at all levels: local, state, and federal. Some of the most immediate and impactful civic engagement can be at the local level, where decisions are made that affect our roads, our schools, our businesses, and our homes. Helping Mainers connect to their local government is part of the League's work in the public interest. In recent years, we have heard from Mainers about the difficulties of readily finding information about local government, including local election information.

Last year, the League set a goal of covering all elections in Maine – state, federal and local – in our online voter guide, [Vote411.org](https://www.vote411.org). In the process of covering local elections, our volunteer researchers realized that many municipalities in Maine do not post important local election information, like municipal ballot questions or the names of candidates for local office, anywhere online. In some cases, this is because the municipality does not have an official website; by our estimate, at least 86 municipalities in Maine do not have an official website, though that figure could be higher. In other cases, municipalities have official websites, but they don't routinely post upcoming local election information. If a voter in that municipality wanted to know what was on their local ballot, they would have to call the town clerk or visit the town office to see the sample ballot. These interactions not only disrupt the busy election work of the clerk, but also require that the voter is free during the hours the town clerk is working or the town office is open. Many Mainers work or provide child or elder care during those times.

The information that we would like to see provided online is information that town clerks already compile. This readily available information would include, whenever applicable: the day, date and title of the election, the voting district designation, if any, the names and location of voting place or places, opening and closing times of the polls, and a specimen ballot or list of the offices and referendum questions for that election.

Two decades into the 21st century, we are living in a world where smartphones, search engines, and social media have made the internet the default information tool for most Mainers.¹ Voters expect that election information will be available online, and they might not know to seek that information out in person or over the phone. Local elections in Maine see much lower turnout rates than state or federal

¹ This recently published Democracy Playbook from the NewDEAL Forum makes a similar recommendation about providing more readily available election information.
<https://newdealforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Democracy-Playbook-Final.pdf>

elections, and one significant reason could be this lack of easily accessible information about what is on the ballot, as well as when the local election is happening, and where.

We understand that municipalities, especially smaller towns, do not always have the resources to maintain an up-to-date official website where clerks can easily post local election information. That is why we support having the Secretary of State's office provide a way for municipalities to submit local election information to be centrally posted through the Secretary of State's website. Such an option would be a significant public service; it would solve the problem for voters without overburdening town clerks.

This will support voter information and high-quality election administration, not only to the Elections Division of the department but also to municipal elections officials around the state. This last point is critical. We hear time and time again that what our local election administrators need most is resources provided by state election officials. Funding LD 577 would help advance that goal.

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