



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini  
The Honorable Chris Caiazzo, Co-Chairs  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 1, 2021

RE: LD 102, An Act To Extend the Time Frame for Processing Absentee Ballots and LD 112,  
An Act To Facilitate the Timely and Accurate Counting of Absentee Ballots By Extending  
the Processing Period

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

My name is Will Hayward. I am here today as the Advocacy Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Maine. 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.

I am testifying in support on LD 102, An Act To Extend the Time Frame for Processing Absentee Ballots and LD 112, An Act To Facilitate the Timely and Accurate Counting of Absentee Ballots By Extending the Processing Period. Both of these bills extend the window for advance processing of absentee ballots from the 4th day prior to the election to the 7th day prior to the election.

Extending the window for municipalities to begin processing absentee ballots from the 4th day prior to the election to the 7th day prior to the election is a common-sense change that was implemented by executive order for the 2020 general election only. By giving municipalities more time and flexibility prior to election day to process absentee ballots, clerks were able to get a head start on working through the historically large quantity of absentee ballots submitted and do so in a timely manner. Aided by this executive order, nearly every municipality in Maine was able to report its unofficial election results on election night.

Crucially, this timely reporting of results helped Maine avoid the issues other states faced with later starting dates for processing absentee ballots, where counting of these ballots took days after the polls closed. While the counting of these ballots was a publicly observable activity with no major issues reported, the delay nonetheless left some citizens in those states with doubt about the validity of the election outcome.

In Maine, we count our absentee ballots at the same time we count election day ballots. Advance processing allows for these ballots to be fed into the tabulating machine prior to Election Day, and

counted in a timely manner on election night. Without advance processing, counting of absentee ballots in a year with high absentee participation could significantly delay the reporting of election results, place undue stress on our elections infrastructure (including local election officials), and potentially harm voter confidence in elections. While the four days currently allotted go a long way towards addressing this problem, a longer window gives towns more time to allocate the various election-related demands of the final week before an election. Enabling by statute for towns to process ballots up to seven days before an election, as was successfully done this year by executive order, will be a small but significant step in supporting the smooth conduct of elections and helping preserve voter faith in Maine's election outcomes. The League strongly supports both of these bills.

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