



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

DATE: May 5, 2021

RE: LD 1575 - An Act To Improve Maine's Election Laws

My name is Will Hayward. I'm here today as the Advocacy Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Maine. We are testifying in favor of LD 1575 - An Act To Improve Maine's Election Laws.

LWVME 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.

LD 1575 was developed in partnership with several organizations that comprise the Mainers for Modern Elections coalition, and aims to build on the lessons learned in the 2020 election to continue to improve Maine elections moving forward. As you have heard, several of the major items in this legislation are also being addressed elsewhere, and we encourage this committee to adopt those items in whichever bill it sees fit. We also recognize that this committee has decided not to move forward with other bills that proposed eliminating the "closed period" for no-excuse absentee voting; we would encourage the committee to re-evaluate the feasibility of shortening this period to include no-excuse absentee voting on Friday before the election, but we will not focus further remarks on this provision today. Instead, we will focus our remarks on the provisions unique to this bill.

Nonpartisan Observation. This bill seeks to enshrine the right to nonpartisan election observation in law. In 2020, the League conducted election observation in over 100 municipalities in all sixteen counties. Our observers helped to validate that the election was transparent and fairly run, as well as to identify a couple of issues such as excessive lines and uneven safety protocol compliance. The League issued a [post-election report](#) that summarized our findings and made several recommendations including those contained in this bill.

However, the League did not enjoy access to the polling place in all municipalities. While we understand space in the polling place is an important consideration and support amending the language in this bill to reflect that, we believe the protection of the right to nonpartisan observation is important.

According to the NCSL, "[Nonpartisan election observation] can help build public trust in a transparent, verifiably democratic electoral process. Nonpartisan observation can provide a particularly important

way for citizens to encourage accountability in the democratic system outside of party structures. In some cases, nonpartisan citizen observers are able to report election administration issues as soon as they arise, thereby helping administrators to respond immediately and avoid further problems.”¹ In our experience, we have found this to be true. We hope this committee will recognize the importance of nonpartisan observation and find a way to protect that right.

Student ID as acceptable proof of identification. This proposal is a minor but clarifying change. On-the-ground observers reported that most clerks already accept in-state student IDs; however, this option is not clearly outlined in law. Adding student ID to the list of acceptable proof of identification documents will help clarify this as an acceptable option for clerks, and we’re pleased to see support for this measure expressed in the testimony submitted by the MTCCA and the Maine Municipal Association.

Election information provisions. One of the major reasons the League supports shortening the closed period for no-excuse absentee voting is the amount of confusion we have encountered among voters and election administrators around special circumstance absentee voting. If the closed period is not adjusted, it is especially important that voters and election administrators have clear, consistent, uniform language about the qualifications for special circumstance absentee voting. This bill contains provisions to implement this and include other pieces of information that are helpful for voters such as dropbox locations in the notice of elections.

Once again, I’d like to thank the committee for the thoughtful work it has already done on the measures contained in this bill also present elsewhere. We hope this committee will take up the additional improvements suggested here, as they will serve to further improve Maine’s election laws.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1575. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

¹ <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/policies-for-election-observers.aspx>