



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

DATE: January 12, 2022

RE: LD 1821 An Act To Make Interfering with an Election Official a Class C Crime

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and members of the committee.

My name is Ann Luther. I'm a resident of Trenton. I am here today as a volunteer on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in support of LD 1821.

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.

Over the years, the League has testified before this committee on hundreds of bills concerning voting rights, elections, and campaign finance. This morning, for the first and probably the only time, we are supporting the reclassification of a crime. We acknowledge that we are not experts in criminal law. But as close observers and students of the democratic process, we believe that threats, intimidation, and assaults against election officials are attacks, not just on those individuals, but on our democracy itself. Like intimidation of a witness or an assault on a police officer, interfering with an election official threatens an institution that keeps our republic safe and fair.

In June 2021, the Brennan Center commissioned a study of local election officials around the country. The officials said that they chose their job because they wanted to serve their community and ensure that elections are run as they should. And yet one in six reported that they had been threatened because of their job.¹ The Reuters news agency has documented more than 800 recent threats against election officials nationwide, including more than 100 threats of death or violence.² We know that there have been instances here in Maine. Yet there have been few arrests and even fewer prosecutions. In

¹ The Brennan Center for Justice: Local Election Officials Survey; June 16, 2021

² <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-election-threats-law-enforcement>

interviews with election officials, the New York Times found that fear and stress is causing a mass exodus of seasoned election professionals.³ We have seen this firsthand, and it should worry all of us.

Maine's local and state election officials are dedicated public servants who deserve our support. They deserve to feel supported by the community at large. Passage of LD 1821 would provide a measure of protection by strengthening the legal consequences for those who threaten or intimidate them. Voting Ought to Pass on LD 1821 is the least we can do to "have the backs" of our clerks and election workers.

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/02/us/politics/2020-election-voting-officials.html>