



TO: The Honorable Joseph Baldacci
The Honorable Ann Matlack, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: February 17, 2021

RE: LD 286, An Act To Make Election Day a State Holiday

My name is Penelope Hamblin. I'm a resident of South Portland and a volunteer representing the League of Women Voters of Maine. Our positions on issues are decided by member consensus. Because we do not have a position on making Election Day a holiday, I am testifying neither for nor against LD 286.

Celebrating democracy, increasing voter turnout, and removing barriers to voting have been at the heart of the League's work for more than a 100 years. We appreciate Representative Collings's intention of advancing these goals.

The rationale for making Election Day a holiday is that it should allow more working people to vote. Most countries hold elections on the weekend for this very reason.

Could a state holiday be a small step toward building a more equitable democracy by reducing barriers to voting? We know that voter turnout in Maine is lowest in districts with the highest poverty rate.¹ There are any number of practical reasons for this. Workers in low-wage jobs, and those working multiple jobs, may not have the luxury of time off. Maine is one of 22 states that do not have laws requiring companies to give employees time off to vote.

Low-income voters may lack transportation or child care, or the resources to overcome a disability or language barrier.

It's important for you to consider whether closure of state and local government offices and schools could have unintended consequences by depriving low-income Mainers of resources that could help them vote that day. If schools close, parents would have the added burden of child care on Election Day. Would public transportation schedules also be curtailed? It's unlikely that health care, service, and retail businesses would close for a state holiday, so many low-wage workers would probably not have the day off. Of course, election offices would be staffed at full capacity, with workers likely earning overtime for working on a state holiday.

¹ Democracy Maine, *Maine: The State of our Democracy*; April 2020. p. 25. Accessed at https://issuu.com/jen-democracymaine/docs/2020_march_state_of_maine_democracy_web

It's difficult to predict the practical impact of an Election Day holiday on voter turnout. A Princeton study done 10 years ago found little improvement in turnout; but more research needs to be done.² Regardless of practical impact, there would be a symbolic value to establishing a civic holiday to honor and celebrate the act of voting. It would raise public awareness and provide interesting opportunities for voter education and engagement.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is supporting several other bills this session that could have a greater impact on reducing barriers to voting: expanded hours for voting before Election Day, Online Voter Registration, and making the absentee ballot process even easier than it already is.

We will be watching and testifying on those bills as well as LD 286. Thank you for your time.

²Henry S. Farber, Princeton University, "Increasing Voter Turnout: Is Democracy Day the Answer?" CEPS Working Paper No. 181, February 2009, <http://www.princeton.edu/ceps/workingpapers/181farber.pdf> [as of February 18, 2019]