



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

DATE: April 24, 2019

RE: LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System

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Good morning. My name is Al Cleveland. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve as one of our organizers. The League of Women Voters of Maine submits the following testimony in support of LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System.

Founded in 1920, the League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The League of Women Voters of Maine, together with our national affiliate and sister Leagues across the country, support new mechanisms to assist in voter registration, including Automatic Voter Registration (AVR). The League of Women Voters of Oregon, California, Alaska, and Connecticut, among others, were part of the coalitions driving AVR forward in their states, paying close attention to bill language to ensure that the new systems of registration did not negatively impact underrepresented communities. We support provisions and safeguards to ensure that all eligible Americans can participate in AVR and that those who are not eligible to vote are not wrongly brought into the system by government action.

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) is a process being adopted by states around the country to modernize their current paper-based systems with systems that use electronic government data to identify and register eligible Americans to vote. AVR also uses the same data to actively update voter registration information when people indicate a change of address to participating agencies. This bill proposes to digitize voter registration transactions and shift from an "opt in" system to an "opt out." When eligible citizens give information to qualified agencies, they are automatically signed up to vote unless they choose to opt out. AVR helps ensure that once citizens are signed up, they remain registered when they move within the state. AVR will help assure election integrity by automatic updating of voting rolls.

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Currently **seventeen states** and D.C. have approved the policy, meaning that over a third of Americans live in a jurisdiction that has either passed or implemented AVR.

AVR would also help young people register to vote, including high school students who would automatically be pre-registered to vote when they receive their first driver's licenses. Studies show that young people are particularly burdened by barriers in the voter registration process. According to the census, people ages 18 to 34 were registered at a rate of 64 percent in 2016, compared with 72 percent of citizens 35 years or older. In 2012, 18- to 29-year-old nonvoters most commonly cited "not being registered" as their reason for not voting.<sup>1</sup>

Maine has been at the forefront of voter participation since a Republican-majority legislature adopted same-day registration in the early 1970s, but according to a report by the Pew Center on the States, "Voter registration in the United States largely reflects its 19th-century origins and has not kept pace with advancing technology and a mobile society."<sup>2</sup> While we do not underestimate the careful planning, design, and training required under this bill to bring us into the 21st century, we want Maine to continue to be a leader in adopting these modernizations.

We encourage you to support LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System.

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<sup>1</sup>Center for American Progress in a report titled, "Increasing Voter Participation in America," July 11, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/> accessed April 20, 2019.

<sup>2</sup>The Pew Center on the States in a report entitled "Inaccurate, Costly, and Inefficient" dated February 2012. <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2012/02/14/inaccurate-costly-and-inefficient-evidence-that-americas-voter-registration-system-needs-an-upgrade>, accessed April 20, 2019