



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

DATE: April 26, 2019

RE: LD 1626 An Act To Implement a Presidential Primary System in Maine

Good morning. My name is Bob Howe of Howe & Cahill, and I'm here today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. The LWVME strongly supports LD 1626.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working since 1920 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.

On February 26, we testified in support of LD 245, An Act to Reestablish a Presidential Primary System in Maine. Our testimony on that bill can be found at this link:

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=91747>

Our position on using primaries in the presidential nomination process is based on the principle that public policy should encourage and support voter participation in our elections. Even when individual caucus locations seem crowded on caucus day, the number of Mainers who participate is far smaller than the number who vote in primaries. Primaries offer a much broader gauge of public support, and draw a more representative electorate, than party caucuses. That is why we strongly supported LD 245 and why we support LD 1626 today.

Four quick additional points:

- Although we generally support LD 1626, we oppose the provision barring non-party voters from the presidential primary election. We support semi-open primaries for the same reason that we support primaries over caucuses: elections should be designed to encourage as many people to participate as possible, and all voters should have the opportunity to participate in the primary election of their choice. (We support LD 211, which will have its work session later today, that would establish a semi-open primary system.)

- The date of the primary should be set in law as in LD 1626. Everyone involved in the process needs this certainty as soon as possible.
- Party nominations touch on both the public interest of the state in the conduct of our elections and the interests of the political parties. Scheduling Maine's primary should be mindful of rules and requirements imposed by the national political parties. We would not want to see our approach to nominations cause Maine any disadvantage relative to the other states. Again, we believe LD 1626 satisfies this consideration.
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- Finally, our elections are the infrastructure of our democracy, and they require not just good public policy, but adequate resources. We urge the committee to do everything possible to ensure that the legislature appropriates the funding needed to implement presidential primary nominations in this biennium.

The future of our democracy depends on robust political participation by active and informed citizens. We believe LD 1626 is a significant step toward securing that future for ourselves and generations to come.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions about our testimony.