



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

DATE: February 25, 2019

RE: LD 293 An Act Regarding Early Voting in Person
LD 619 RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine
Regarding Early Voting

My name is Penelope Hamblin. I'm a resident of South Portland. I am here today as a volunteer representing the members of the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League supports LD 293 and LD 619.

We support measures that provide for the smooth, professional, and error-free conduct of elections. Here in Maine we have enjoyed a long history of professional, nonpartisan, voter-friendly administration of elections. Our town and city clerks are among the most recognized and trusted government officials in our communities.

But we have a problem. The high volume of absentee voting is causing undue stress on our local election officials. In some municipalities, absentee ballots constitute up to 60% of all ballots cast. Because these require special handling by election officials, they are extremely labor intensive.

In the 2018 general election, 174,000 citizens — that's 17% of all registered voters in the state — voted early. That means they all voted absentee. Our no-excuse absentee voting system allows any voter to request an absentee ballot up to three days before the election for any reason. Some municipalities even run centralized in-person absentee voting, whereby the voter appears in person at the town office or polling place and fills out the ballot then and there. But this is not true early voting. The ballot is not recorded or scanned as it would be on Election Day. The voter seals it into an absentee ballot envelope, signs the envelope, and turns it in to an election official.

Securely storing and processing all of these absentee ballots strains the workload of local election officials, and there are legitimate security concerns raised by the process. There is a

danger that they may be misplaced, as happened in one town in 2017, where a box containing hundreds of ballots wasn't found until the day after Election Day.¹ There are also privacy concerns, in that the voter's name on an absentee ballot may be more easily linked to that person's vote than in the regular, secret-ballot process that is used on Election Day.

The legislature has taken action in recent years to alleviate the strain on election workers. A cutoff has been set at three days before Election Day to request an absentee ballot without providing an excuse. And current law now allows election workers to scan absentee ballots through optical scanning machines on the Saturday or Monday before Election Day.

While these measures have helped, it is high time to take the next step and allow true early voting, where the voter completes a ballot and puts it into the ballot box or scanning machine directly on the day they vote.

The League believes that true early voting offers a more secure, orderly process for the conduct of elections and an important convenience for voters. Ideally, we would like to see the early voting period cover at least one weekend before the election.

Since we believe this solution requires a Constitutional Amendment, rather than just a statutory change, we prefer LD 619 over the statutory changes proposed in LD 293.

We thank the sponsors for bringing these bills forward. Thank you for your consideration.

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<https://www.pressherald.com/2017/09/06/more-ballots-found-count-resumes-in-scarborough-school-budget-vote/>