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TO: The Honorable John Atwood, Chair
Members of the Commission to Study the Conduct of Elections in Maine

FROM: Valerie Marsh, League of Women Voters of Maine

Good evening, Chairman Atwood, and members of the Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, once again, this evening. My name is Val Marsh, and I am member of the state board of the League of Women Voters of Maine.

It is only fitting that the League sits with you here tonight, at the top of the state, as your task of gathering public opinion winds down, and as you deliberate on recommendations to craft into a document for the coming legislative session. We have been with you nearly every step of the way, and it has been quite a journey. We wish to extend our deep gratitude for your willingness to work for the greater good here in Maine. Many thanks for all of your hours of work and your commitment to listening to citizen input.

As you know, the League of Women Voters is dedicated to a robust democracy that is wholly inclusive and that encourages strong citizen participation at every level. Voting is the very foundation of a sound democracy. It is a right for every citizen that must be safeguarded and protected. Without protection for all, our system of government is vulnerable to all manner of threats. We believe any efforts that result in the reduction or disenfranchisement of citizens exercising their lawful right to vote must be rejected.

You know the League of Women Voters' positions on key issues. A brief summary of these positions includes the following beliefs:

- LWVME endorses Election-Day registration;
- LWVME opposes a photo ID requirement to vote;
- LWVME supports measures to encourage student voting; and
- LWVME applauds Maine's exemplary challenged ballot law.

My colleague, Ann Luther, previously discussed with members of the Commission League recommendations that would improve the Election Day efficiency and ease burdens of municipalities. I would like to refer back to one of Ann's points, which was the recommendation to use any remaining HAVA money to purchase new or upgraded optical scanning equipment.

One additional benefit of upgrading equipment is that it would help facilitate our final recommendation to the Commission - Instant Run-off Voting (IRV), also known as Ranked Ballot Voting.

Obviously, democracy can and should involve more than two parties. Until we resolve how best to approach a fair election system for three or more candidates, our system of government is vulnerable to election outcomes that do not represent the public will. The League of Women Voters, in good conscience, must continue to advocate for the best election system possible.

Instant run-off voting has been used successfully in several municipal elections across the nation. IRV enables one to vote for his/her true first choice, while indicating a second and third choice candidate. In the event that no candidate garners 50% plus one vote, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated, and voters who ranked that candidate first have their votes recast to their second choice candidate. This process is repeated until one candidate garners 50% plus one vote. IRV avoids sequential run-off elections and enables the voter to cast a "single transferable vote," ensuring that the winning candidate has a majority. Legislation to implement IRV has previously been submitted in Maine

Supporters claim that IRV guarantees that candidates win by a majority vote, not merely a plurality, and that it enables the voter to cast a vote for his/her favorite candidate without concern for whether the vote would be "thrown away" or work to bolster the showing of his/her least favorite candidate.

After three years of study and discussion, the League of Women Voters of Maine reached concurrence with the League of Women Voters of Minnesota in favor of Instant Runoff Voting. The final position reads as follows:

The League of Women Voters of Maine supports election systems for elected offices in single seat elections that require the winner to receive a majority of the votes, as long as the majority is achieved by Instant Runoff Voting/Ranked Choice Voting, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

In general, League members believe that the winner of single seat elections should be determined by a majority vote, and they support a system of Instant Runoff Voting (or Ranked Choice Voting) for determining the majority winner. However, League members did not reach consensus on the question of whether the majority winner should be determined by a traditional run-off election between the top two candidates in the first-round election. While there was strong support among members for majority-winner elections, that support diminished if the winner had to be determined by a traditional runoff election. Some of the factors that were important included: increased opportunity for strategic voting during the original election, expense to the state and municipalities in conducting the run-off election, extending the campaign season, driving up the cost of campaign financing, loss of civility during the runoff election, and the significant

reduction in voter engagement and turnout in traditional runoff elections.

With this position, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports the right of local governments to choose IRV for their local elections regardless of what system is used at the state level.

We understand that because Maine's constitution specifies that candidates be elected by a plurality of the vote, there is a question of whether or not instituting IRV would require an amendment to our State Constitution. We would support such an amendment.

We also know there are practical issues that would need to be resolved, in order for IRV to be possible. As I mentioned previously, implementing IRV would require better optical scanning equipment statewide. This upgrading process, while expensive and complicated logistically, clearly serves more than one purpose – it helps ease burdens and increase efficiencies for municipalities, and it provides citizens a method to elect a candidate who has earned a true majority.

Thank you, once again, for this opportunity to share our views this evening. And again, many thanks for putting your own shoulders to the wheel, in the never ending pursuit of a more perfect democracy.