



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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

DATE: May 6, 2013

RE: LD 1422 An Act To Establish a Nonpartisan Primary and a Presidential Primary
Election System and Instant Run-off Voting for State and Federal Candidates

Good morning. My name is Emily Shaw. I'm a resident of Oakland. I work as a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve on its Advocacy Committee. The League of Women Voters of Maine submits the following testimony neither for nor against LD 1422.

As we've testified before this Committee on LDs 518 and 860, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports election systems for offices in single seat elections that require the winner to receive a majority of the votes, as long as the majority is achieved by Ranked Choice Voting, rather than a second, separate runoff election.

To reiterate, here's why the League supports Ranked Choice Voting (RCV):

- RCV ensures a majority winner
- It minimizes "strategic" voting
- It allows voters to express their sincere preferences among candidates
- RCV eliminates problems of spoiler candidates knocking off major candidates
- RCV does not require separate run-off elections
- It promotes civility in campaigns
- RCV is most likely to elect a candidate with broad appeal
- It may improve voter participation

Plurality voting, in which the candidate with the most votes wins, can be thorny in elections with more than two candidates. Voters may sometimes be reluctant to vote for the candidate they most strongly support for fear of facilitating the election of the candidate they most strongly oppose. The winning candidate may be one fervently supported by a minority of voters – albeit a winning plurality – but lacking the broad support of a majority of voters.

Ranked Choice Voting, on the other hand, encourages candidates to reach out to more voters, alleviates concerns about the “spoiler effect,” and ensures the election of candidates who have majority support.

Implementing Ranked Choice Voting would most likely require a multi-year plan, possibly involving an amendment to Maine's Constitution, followed by enabling legislation, rule-making, logistical planning, and deployment, not to mention public education. We stand ready to support all of these measures in the service of a more representative democracy.

We support those aspects of LD 1422 that deal with Ranked Choice Voting. We believe the effective date of 2014 proposed here is not practical, and we find the surviving title, LD 518, to be a better-drafted vehicle for moving RCV forward.

LD 1422 also proposes an open primary, under which voters may participate in the primary election of their choice, regardless of their own enrollment status. Republicans could vote in the Democratic primary and vice versa. Unenrolled voters could fully participate in the primary election of their choice. The League of Women Voters has no position on open primaries.

LD 1422 does NOT propose a nonpartisan blanket primary, also known as a top-two primary. Under a top-two primary system, all candidates run in the same primary, regardless of political affiliation, and the top two vote-getters advance to the general election. Two candidates from the same party could both advance to the general election, and in states that have a top-two primary system (Louisiana, Washington, and California), that is often the outcome. Although that is not the proposal in LD 1422, we have heard the top-two primary system discussed as an alternative to Ranked Choice Voting. The League has no position on the top-two primary system. Compared to Ranked Choice Voting, it would result in a majority winner, and it would be less costly to implement, but it would not eliminate strategic voting, and it would not promote civility in campaigns.

LD 1422 also requires a Presidential primary election, as opposed to the current party caucus method. The League also has no position on this aspect of the bill, but we note that this Committee dealt extensively with a similar proposal in the last Legislature.

In summary, the League of Women Voters of Maine supports Ranked Choice Voting, and we urge this Committee to find a way to take the first steps down the road to a public debate about the appropriate cost and timeframe for its ultimate implementation in Maine's state and federal elections.