



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: April 22, 2013

RE: LD 518 An Act To Establish Ranked-choice Voting in the State

LD 860 An Act To Require That the Governor, Senators and Members of the
House of Representatives Be Elected by the Ranked-choice Voting Method

This is in response to Rep. Johnson's question from the public hearing on LDs 518 and 860 regarding the assertion in our testimony that instituting Ranked Choice Voting could improve voter turnout.

The League of Women Voters conducted a study of Ranked Choice Voting culminating in March, 2011, when the state board adopted the following position:

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.

A full copy of the Study Guide that our members used to consider the issue is attached, for those who are interested in learning more. It can be found online at <http://www.lwvme.org/files/lwvmeIRV.pdf>. The relevant section on voter turnout begins on Page 8. Here is an excerpt:

Despite these problems, the study found that changing to an alternative voting system increased voter turnout by about five percentage points. The authors examined the effect of cumulative voting (see Glossary) on turnout in about 100 communities across the United States, mostly in Texas, some in Alabama, New Mexico, and a scattering of others, including one in South Dakota.¹ One of the authors of the study, Shaun Bowler of University of California Riverside, said, "The best we can tell is that changing the electoral system will boost turnout—

¹ Shaun Bowler, University of California Riverside, David Brockington, Universiteit Twente, Todd Donovan, Western Washington University, "Election Systems and Voter Turnout: Experiments in the United States." Paper presented at 1997 American Political Association Meeting.

probably somewhere in the low single digits. It's a consistent finding. So far as I know all studies show an increase is likely. None show a decrease."²

The Vermont Commission speculates that IRV would increase turnout by pointing to mayoral elections in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in the 1970's that were conducted using IRV. When an election had only two credible contenders, voter turnout was low. When a third party candidate was added, voter turnout jumped 28%. It adds that other nations that use IRV have far higher levels of voter participation than Vermont does, but other factors may be responsible for this as well, such as the day (or days) of the week on which elections are held or whether voting is required by law.³

We hope this information is helpful to the committee.

Ann Luther
Advocacy Chair

² Shaun Bowler, e-mail message to Tony Solgard, Oct. 29, 2003.

³ "IRV Could Increase Voter Participation," Final Report of the Vermont Commission to Study Instant Runoff Voting.