



TO: The Honorable Senator Ned Claxton
The Honorable Representative Danny Martin, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: February 20, 2019

RE: LD 431 An Act to Make Election Day a State Holiday

My name is Regina Coppens. I am a resident of Belgrade. I'm a volunteer with the League of Women Voters of Maine. The League is a non-partisan, membership-led organization. We do not have a consensus position on making Election Day a holiday, and I am testifying today neither for nor against LD 431.

Voting is a sacred right of citizenship. The League has been celebrating and protecting that right for almost 100 years. We appreciate the sponsor's intent to make Election Day a state holiday dedicated to celebrating our democracy.

This is hardly a radical proposal. Election Day is already a public holiday in eight states and the territory of Puerto Rico. And it's a popular idea: a poll of 10,000 Americans conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2018 found that 65% were in favor of making Election Day a national holiday.

Improving voter turnout and removing barriers to voting are goals that we work for year-in and year-out. We applaud Representative Collings and the co-sponsors of this bill for seeking to accomplish these goals through enactment of LD 431. However, while declaring a holiday might have a symbolic impact, it's not clear that it would increase voter turnout. There is some evidence that it would have no effect. A study by Henry Farber, Professor of Economics at Princeton, comparing voting by state employees in holiday and non-holiday states, concluded that, "Having an election holiday, by itself, is not an effective strategy to increase voter turnout."¹ We wish there were more peer-reviewed studies of this subject, as the lack of evidence makes it hard to craft good public policy.

There may also be tradeoffs and consequences that you will want to consider. Is it likely that private businesses would close or provide time off to employees? Many of the prospective voters who might benefit the most from an Election Day holiday may work in sectors like retail and health care that routinely require their employees to work holidays. Would the closing of

schools create a hardship for parents who would need child care, making it harder for them to vote? Is it worth the cost of lost productivity?

We're proud that Maine consistently ranks among the top states in voter turnout. We have in place one of the most effective measures available for encouraging high voter participation: Election Day registration. We already offer no-excuse absentee voting. And we hope that more pro-voter reforms are on the way. The League is supporting a package of bills that propose to remove barriers to voting and promote a voting culture, including LD 211 An Act to Open Maine's Primaries and Permit Unenrolled Voters to Cast Ballots in Primary Elections, LD 245 An Act to Re-establish a Presidential Primary System in Maine, and LD 619 Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Regarding Early Voting. Early Voting, especially if it includes a provision for voting on weekends, would offer a substantial convenience for voters who are unable to make it to the polls on Election Day.

We see no harm in making Election Day a state holiday. It would have symbolic value by promoting and honoring democracy and the right to vote. However, we have found no evidence that it will accomplish improvements in voter turnout.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹Henry S. Farber, Princeton University, "Increasing Voter Turnout: Is Democracy Day the Answer?" CEPS Working Paper No. 181, February 2009, <http://www.princeton.edu/ceps/workingpapers/181farber.pdf> [as of February 18, 2019]