



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

DATE: March 20, 2019

RE: LD 1083 – An Act To Implement Ranked-choice Voting for Presidential Primary and General Elections in Maine

Good morning. My name is Ann Luther. I'm the Advocacy Chair of the League of Women Voters of Maine, a volunteer, and a resident of Trenton.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is Maine's leading voice for a wide array of measures that would improve and strengthen our democratic process, including ranked choice voting.

The League of Women Voters in Maine traces its roots back 100 years to the struggle for women's suffrage. To this day, our advocacy continues our long history of work to guarantee the rights of citizens to vote, to secure our election administration with modern best practices, to implement reforms that enhance voter turnout and participation, and to protect our elections against the undue influence of big money.

On March 7, 2011 – just over eight years ago – LWVME issued its policy position supporting ranked choice voting in Maine. We support RCV because it:

- ✓ Gives voters more meaningful choices: Ranked choice voting allows candidates from outside the two major parties to compete and supports a diversity of views.
- ✓ Eliminates spoilers and strategic voting: Ranked choice voting allows voters to support their favorite candidate without worrying that they might split their votes with like-minded voters and unintentionally help elect the candidate they like the least.
- ✓ Reduces negative campaigning: Voters are less likely to rank a candidate highly who is negative toward their preferred candidate.
- ✓ Reduces the influence of money in politics: By making negative advertising less effective, ranked choice voting reduces the need for, and influence of, money in politics.

All of these considerations also apply in presidential nominations and elections--and with even greater urgency.

LD 1083 would do several things. It would restore presidential primaries, which we strongly support. And, it would require the use of ranked choice voting in presidential primaries and the presidential general election, which we also support.

However, section 5 of the bill (p. 1, lines 29-30) would codify a “closed primary.” We oppose this provision because we believe semi-open primaries will enhance voter engagement with the nominating process. We will provide more detailed support for semi-open primaries when we testify on LD 211 later this session.

There may also be new challenges in applying ranked choice voting in the context of the presidential primaries. Party rules may allocate delegates proportionally based on primary results—not winner take all. Maine’s other RCV elections are all single-seat elections with only one winner, so this multi-winner scenario presents some uncharted territory for RCV in Maine. Nevertheless, the RCV tabulation in a primary should be run down to the final two candidates statewide and separately in each CD.

Likewise in the general election, there is a need to clarify how RCV and the National Popular Vote could work together. Specifically, is Maine’s NPV tally based on the first round tabulation, or is it based on the final round winner? In order to remain consistent with other participants in the NCV compact, we recommend that the RCV clause in the general election be sunsetted or suspended if NPV goes into effect.

There are three amendments which we would suggest to the committee:

1. delete the provision requiring closed primaries
2. specify that in the primary election for president, the Secretary of State must tabulate the RCV winner in each congressional district as well as the statewide winner (since the political parties need these results to allocate delegates under their party rules)
3. specify that in the event that the national popular vote compact is adopted pursuant to LD 816 the use of RCV in the presidential election should be suspended.

We fully support this measure with those amendments.

You can find a great deal of information on semi-open primaries, ranked choice voting, and a wide range of democracy issues on our website which we invite you to review.

www.lwvme.org.