



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

DATE: April 24, 2019

RE: LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System

Good morning. My name is Gina Coppens. I'm a resident of Belgrade. I am here today as a volunteer on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine and serve on its Advocacy Committee. I am testifying in support of LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System.

A shocking 20-point gap exists in registration rates between Americans making less than \$25,000 per year and individuals making \$100,000 or more per year.¹ AVR can help close that gap.

One of the advantages of AVR is that when people move and update their driver's licenses, their voter registration is automatically updated too. In Maine, on average 14% of the population move each year. That number is higher among lower income families: 26% of families earning under \$10,000, and 19% of those earning between \$10,000 and \$25,000, move each year.²

AVR will mean one less burden for these families and help them stay on the voter registration rolls. There are racial and ethnic disparities, too. While 14% of white non-hispanic adult citizens in Maine move every year, that figure compares to 22% for people of colors.

Under the federal National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which the League helped pass in 1993, certain public assistance agencies, such as DVM, MaineCare, SNAP, and WIC, are required to help people register to vote. Maine is among five states who failed to report any data to the EAC about registering voters in public assistance agencies between the period of

¹ Center for American Progress in a report titled, "Increasing Voter Participation in America," July 11, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/> accessed April 20, 2019.

². Source by email: MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 using the Integrated Public Use Microdata System. Data for citizens only. Five-year average for citizens aged 18 and older. Note such moves could be in-state or out of state.

2012 and 2014.^{3,4,5} This data followed the trend of reporting from earlier years, as well, where Maine did not report any voter registrations at public assistance agencies. This could be a reflection of lack of reporting, or it could be a lack of compliance with the law. In any case, having a system in place that automatically registers people to vote would streamline the process and help Maine fully comply with NVRA.

We want to make a particular plea for the eventual inclusion of other agencies besides the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) in the AVR program. While we understand that the BMV is an obvious phase one target for AVR, we hope that additional state and federal agencies will eventually be included if they already collect the information needed to assure that their clients are qualified to vote in Maine. Limiting AVR only to those who have a car or who have a driver's license or state ID could have the effect of increasing the voting advantage that some of our citizens already enjoy, while deepening the divide for those who are already marginalized. Eventually including agencies like MaineCare can help close that gap.

As you have heard from the League of Women Voters before, we are committed to engaging all Maine people in the process of electing our leaders and encouraging all eligible voters to participate in the electoral process. The first step toward participation in elections is registering to vote. Automatic Voter Registration will make it easier for many eligible Maine citizens to take that first step — to get registered to vote. This one improvement will make registering easier for Maine people, will reduce the potential for errors in the voting rolls, and will ultimately save money and time at all levels of the election process.

We encourage you to support LD 1463 An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System.

³Douglas R. Hess, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Grinnell College, in the *Washington Post*, July 4, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/07/04/states-are-ignoring-federal-law-about-voter-registration-heres-why/?utm_term=.3b54f22fab5f, accessed April 20, 2019.

⁴Demos in a report titled, "Driving the Vote: Are States Complying with the Motor Voter Requirements of the National Voter Registration Act?" February 5, 2015, <https://www.demos.org/research/driving-vote-are-states-complying-motor-voter-requirements-national-voter-registration-act> accessed April 21, 2019.

⁵2014 EAC Election Administration and Voting Survey Comprehensive Report, A Report to the 114th Congress, Table 2a: Application Sources, Total Forms Received, pg 80. <https://www.eac.gov/research-and-data/studies-and-reports/> accessed April 22, 2019.