



PO Box 863
Augusta, ME 04332
(207) 622-0256
lwvme@gwi.net
www.lwvme.org

To: Honorable Senator Nichi Farnham
Honorable Representative Michael Beaulieu
The Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

From: League of Women Voters of Maine

Re: LD 503, Resolve, Directing the Secretary of State To Examine the Issue of a Run-off Election for Governor

Date: March 23, 2011

My name is Michelle Small, and I live in Brunswick. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Maine, and I am here as a volunteer to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 503, Resolve, Directing the Secretary of State To Examine the Issue of a Run-off Election for Governor.

The League of Women Voters of the United States, a nonpartisan political organization with 50 state Leagues and more than 800 local Leagues, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Following several years of study and discussion, the League of Women Voters of Maine recently reached concurrence with the League of Women Voters of Minnesota in favor of Instant Runoff Voting, sometimes known as Ranked Choice Voting. Based on that position, the League endorses the election of candidates in single seat elections by a majority vote, if achieved through Instant Runoff Voting.

Other state Leagues that support Instant Runoff Voting are those in Arizona, California, North Carolina, Vermont and Washington.

Plurality voting, in which the candidate with the most votes wins, can be ~~dysfunctional~~ problematic in elections with more than two candidates ~~run~~. Voters may be reluctant to vote for the candidate they most strongly support for fear of helping to elect a 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. Instant Runoff Voting, on the other hand, encourages candidates to reach out to more peoplevoters, alleviates concerns about the “spoiler effect,” and guarantees the election of candidates who have majority support.

Our members believe that the winner of single seat elections should be determined by a majority vote, and we support a system of Instant Runoff Voting (or Ranked Choice Voting) to determine the majority winner. However, the League does not agree that the majority winner should be determined by a traditional run-off election between the top two candidates in the first-round election.

Some of the factors driving that view included: expense to the state, extension of the campaign season, driving up the cost of campaign financing, loss of civility during the runoff, danger of strategic voting during the original election, and significant reduction in voter engagement and turnout in traditional runoff elections.

Thus, the League of Women Voters supports a study of an election method that would end plurality voting in the gubernatorial race. However, ~~we~~ would prefer that the study ~~examine~~ Instant Runoff Voting as a substitute for traditional run-off elections.