



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Lisa T. Marraché
The Honorable Representative John L. Patrick, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

RE: LD 1549 An Act Concerning Voter Registration

Sponsor: Rep. Fitts

Good afternoon. I'm Ann Luther, state president of the League of Women Voters of Maine. Protecting the right of every citizen to vote and encouraging citizens to exercise the right to vote is key to our democracy and central to the mission of the League of Women Voters. Because LD 1549 would have the effect of limiting citizen access to the ballot box, we urge that you vote "Ought Not To Pass" on this bill.

Since 1973, Maine has successfully allowed citizens to register to vote on Election Day. This practice eliminates unnecessary hurdles and barriers to citizen participation in the election process and increases voter turnout. Together with the six other states that have also allowed same day voter registration,¹ Maine generally has a voter participation rate that is 5 to 15% higher than states without same day voter registration. A survey by the Hoover Institution² showed that "...states with same-day voter registration were among the states with the five highest voter turnout rates in the 2004 elections. ...The voter turnout rate for the entire United States is 63.8 percent. The states with same day or no registration averaged 74.9%."

Same-day registration may be the single most important practice that states can implement to improve voter turnout. Results of a U.S. Census Bureau survey show that 17.4% of Americans who did not vote in 2004 failed to do so because they did not meet the registration deadlines.³ According to a May 2001 poll, nearly two-thirds (64%) of all non-voters said that allowing people to register and vote on Election Day would make them more likely to vote.⁴ On the heels of record-setting turnout in 2004, now is not the

¹ Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming. North Dakota which has no voter registration requirement, for this purpose, functions in the same way. Montana enacted same-day registration that went into effect for the first time in 2006. A same-day registration bill passed the Iowa State Legislature in late March, 2007, and has been sent to their governor for an expected signature.

² The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, is a public policy research center devoted to advanced study of politics, economics, and political economy—both domestic and foreign—as well as international affairs that aims to put its accumulated knowledge to work as a contributor to the world marketplace of ideas defining a free society. Their report on voter turnout can be found at <http://www.hoover.org/research/factsandpolicy/facts/4552956.html>.

³ "Voting and Registration in the Election of 2004," issued March 2006 by the U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>, Table E, page 13.

⁴ Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, www.yvoteline.org/noshows2000.shtml

time to take a step backward by imposing laws that will create new barriers for potential voters.

Arguments against election-day registration generally rest on two points: first, the increased possibility of fraud because a person might attempt to register at more than one location on Election Day. Such claims have generally proved to be unfounded in Maine. In addition, the new Centralized Voter Registration List, in place for the next election as required by the Federal Help America Vote Act, will make it much more difficult for anyone to register more than once in the State of Maine.

The second argument against election-day registration is that it gives one party an advantage over the other. However, it does not appear that other liberalized voting efforts of the past have had a partisan bias, and there is no reason to suspect that same-day registration has had a biased effect in Maine.⁵

Voter awareness of registration deadlines is by far the highest in states with election-day registration, as opposed to states that have a registration deadline in advance of Election Day, where voters are more likely to be ignorant or mistaken about the deadline.⁶ Since so many people in Maine are aware that we have same-day registration, reversing our current law would undoubtedly have the unfortunate effect of disenfranchising some voters who will miss the new deadline because they believe they can register at the polling place on Election Day. Passage of this law would inevitably mean that many Maine citizens would be caught unawares and therefore deprived of one of the most fundamental rights of a citizen: the right to vote.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine, I urge that you vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 1549.

Sincerely,

Ann Luther, President
League of Women Voters of Maine
18 April 2007

⁵ Thomas E. Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter: Public Involvement in an Age of Uncertainty*, (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), p. 134-136. Excerpt attached. Thomas Patterson is the Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University. The 2000 Vanishing Voter Project conducted more than 80,000 interviews during the 2000 Presidential campaign.

⁶ Ibid. p. 134.