



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

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Coalition Warns Legislature Not to End Same Day Voting

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Portland – A diverse coalition of advocates for seniors, students, and women have a special Memorial Day weekend message for lawmakers: Leave Maine's voting laws alone.

The Maine House of Representatives is scheduled to vote on Tuesday on a proposal, sponsored by Speaker of the House Robert Nutting and Secretary of State Charles Summers, that would eliminate same day voter registration (or Election Day voter registration). The vote is expected to be extremely close.

“There are few activities more patriotic and none more fundamental to our democracy than voting,” said Shenna Bellows, Executive Director of the Maine Civil Liberties Union. “We honor those who died defending our country by preserving the fundamental freedoms for which they sacrificed so much. It would be a shame to roll back broad public access to the right to vote.”

In 2010, 18,364 Maine voters registered to vote on Election Day. In 2008, 49,666 voters registered to vote on Election Day. The proposal before the legislature would require voters to register ahead of time in order to vote on Election Day.

“Election day registration is part of Maine's vibrant democratic tradition,” said Sarah Standiford, Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby. “Turning back the clock means more barriers to vote – especially for those in our communities who move frequently, including busy single moms, young women, and basically anyone who lives on the economic margins.”

Same day voter registration was passed into law unanimously by the Maine State Legislature when it was last controlled by the Republicans in 1973. At the time, Senator Elden H. Shute (R-Farmington) was the chief sponsor. The Maine Supreme Judicial Court issued an opinion in 1973 (303 A.2d 452), which appears to support same-day voter registration, stating that any durational residency requirement would be constitutionally permissible only as far as it was necessary for the actual process of registration.

Proponents of LD 1376 have suggested that the measures would eliminate voter fraud, but only two known cases of an individual voting twice have been identified in the past thirty years in Maine.

“Having worked to make the voting process easy for voters and manageable for poll workers alike, I know that our system is working well,” said John Smith, former Deputy Secretary of State. “Maine has secure, accurate and accessible elections. There is no need to change a system that is not broken.”

In 1972, prior to adoption of same day voter registration, Maine ranked 21st in the country in voter turnout. In 2008, Maine had the third highest voter turn-out in the country. The only states to surpass Maine in voter turn-out in 2008, Minnesota and Wisconsin, also have Election Day voter registration.

LD 1376 is opposed by the AARP, Disability Rights Center, EqualityMaine, Homeless Voices for Justice, the League of Women Voters, the League of Young Voters, the Maine Civil Liberties Union, the Maine People’s Alliance, Maine Women’s Lobby, and Preble Street Resource Center.

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