

The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Oppose LD 1463

"An Act To Create an Automatic Voter Registration System"

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck, and distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to LD 1463.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center does not support LD 1463 because it creates an automatic voter registration system in the state of Maine. Currently, only 17 other states and the District of Columbia have implemented similar proposals to automatically enroll voters.¹ While this bill is likely well-intentioned, the state of Maine should be cautious about such a system.

Proponents of this bill will claim it will save Mainers time and money and “ensure every Mainer has the opportunity to cast their vote.”² The current system already ensures every Mainer has the opportunity to register to vote. This merely takes personal responsibility out of the equation, allowing government to initiate the process for them. The most glaring flaw of the bill is that it creates an opt-out system rather than requiring individuals to opt in. While we believe more people should register to vote and participate in the electoral process, automatically registering individuals as voters simply for coming into contact with state government is not how this goal should be accomplished.

All citizens have a right to participate in our elections, and similarly they have the right to abstain from voting. An individual should not be registered to vote unless they knowingly give their consent to being registered. This is currently accomplished by visiting your town office and filling out a voter registration card. The Maine Heritage Policy Center acknowledges that some Mainers cannot secure reliable transportation or struggle with health conditions that make travel difficult, which is why we have not opposed LD 1570, a bill that would allow Maine citizens to register to vote online. However, the automatic voter registration system outlined in LD 1463 is a step too far and opens up our elections to potential fraud and abuse.

The bill acknowledges the possibility of ineligible individuals being enrolled as voters and exempts them from being liable for this mistake. Approximately 1,500 people, including non-citizens, were “wrongly registered” through the automatic voter registration system in California after implementation of a similar proposal.³ One month earlier, the California DMV revealed it made errors in approximately 23,000 voter registrations.⁴ California also had to fix issues with two registration cards being processed for a single

¹<https://speakergideon.com/2019/04/01/speaker-sara-gideon-introduces-bipartisan-legislation-to-create-automatic-voter-registration-system-in-maine/>

² Ibid.

³ <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-dmv-more-voter-registration-errors-20181008-story.html>

⁴ <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-dmv-voter-registration-error-20180905-story.html>

voter.⁵ The voter registration system outlined in LD 1463 poses serious threats to the integrity of our elections, especially if similar mistakes are made in Maine. Elections in Maine are often decided by just a handful of votes. We cannot risk the outcome of these elections being altered by ineligible people voting or through the use of duplicate registrations.

This bill would also allow the Secretary of State and the governor to designate universities as source entities that can automatically enroll individuals as voters if they collect documents that provide proof of voter eligibility. The Maine Heritage Policy Center is concerned with this provision because it would facilitate the enrollment of college students that may not have a full-time address in Maine; they are simply attending college in the state. We are not opposed to college students exercising their right to vote, but more should be done to educate students about the residency rules we impose to vote in Maine elections.⁶ Past and present students may have unknowingly violated residency rules by participating in our elections. While we should encourage students to exercise their right to vote, we should also encourage they legally cast ballots, whether it be in Maine or their home state.

In sum, Mainers have plenty of opportunity to become registered voters and the language outlined in this bill raises serious questions about the integrity of our elections. For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, “Ought Not to Pass” on this bill. Thank you.

⁵ <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-motor-voter-registrations-errors-20180524-story.html>

⁶ <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/voter-info/images/residencyfactsSheet.030918FINAL.pdf>