

## **The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Oppose LD 1722 "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 1722.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center is opposed to LD 1722 because it would direct the Secretary of State to study and develop a plan for an automatic voter registration system. Currently, only 17 other states and the District of Columbia have implemented similar proposals to automatically enroll voters.<sup>1</sup> While this bill is likely well-intentioned, the state of Maine should be cautious about such a system.

Proponents of automatic voter registration systems will claim it will save Mainers time and money and “ensure every Mainer has the opportunity to cast their vote.”<sup>2</sup> 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 an automatic voter registration system is that it would likely create 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, an automatic voter registration system would be a step too far and opens up our elections to potential fraud and abuse.

Other states that have adopted an automatic voter registration system have experienced issues after implementation. Approximately 1,500 people, including non-citizens, were “wrongly registered” through the automatic voter registration system in California after implementation of a similar proposal.<sup>3</sup> One month earlier, the California DMV revealed it made errors in approximately 23,000 voter registrations.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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

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

California also had to fix issues with two registration cards being processed for a single voter.<sup>5</sup> 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.

In sum, Mainers have plenty of opportunity to become registered voters and an automatic voter registration system would raise serious questions about the integrity of our elections in Maine. While this bill would be better than LD 1463, we do not support automatic voter registration in general. For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 1722. Thank you.

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