



City of Biddeford, Maine

Carmen J. Morris
City Clerk

Date: January 11, 2022

To: Senator Louis J. Luchini, Senate Chair
Representative Chris Caiazzo, House Chair
And members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

From: Carmen J. Morris, Biddeford City Clerk *ejm*

Re: LD 1821 - An Act to Make Interfering with an Election Official a Class C Crime

Position: Support

I strongly support LD 1821 and thank you for the opportunity to share my experience.

In today's political climate, there seems to be more of a sense of voter empowerment than ever before. Election Laws are written and implemented for the ease of the voter and the election process on the whole. These same Election Laws do not always take into account the challenge of upholding and perpetrating their enforcement.

As the Chief Election Officials of our communities, City and Town Clerks are tasked with following all Election Laws to the tee, while maintaining the integrity of the election process - from the nomination process to reporting of the final tallies after Election Day. Often, we are questioned, challenged and confronted along the way, and we defend and uphold the prescribed Laws like the good stewards that we are. We put up with the verbal attacks, the accusations, the intimidation and sometimes even threats all in the name of doing our jobs.

Over my almost 15 years as City Clerk in Biddeford (having worked in the City Clerk's Office for over 27 years), I can recall a few instances of feeling attacked and/or intimidated due to a voter challenging me about an election process or Law. I will share one such experience, which is from the 2020 Presidential Election. There was a voter who was very upset about a particular sign that was hung by a non-partisan group who was set up outside the polling place to assist folks (specifically those whose first language is NOT English) with the voter registration process. This sign was perfectly fine and was not supportive of Democrats or Republicans - it was simply supportive of voter rights.

One particular gentleman made a huge stink about it and came to find me two different times during Election Day to make his complaint and literally demand that I have the sign taken down. The first time he spoke to me, I refused to have the sign removed, and explained to him that the sign did not violate any law, at which time he became visibly agitated and got closer to getting right in my face. I

continued to stand my ground until he stormed off in anger. Later in the day, he came back to the polling place, found a police officer and then came and found me for a second time. He again, got in my face and demanded that I take the sign down, and I again, refused. He then asked me what I would do if he went outside and incited (or at least tried to incite) the crowd and possibly cause a riot. I simply looked right at him and told him that if he did that, it would then become a problem for the police officer who was standing there with us. (The police officer, who recorded the conversation using his body camera, did not end up saying anything, but was only there at the request of the angry voter). The voter again, stormed off and went and found a news reporter who happened to be at our polling place (Jim Keithly). The news reporter later told me that the voter had approached him and staked his complain about the sign, and the reporter would not give the angered voter credence.

In retrospect, this incident could have truly gone very badly. The voter clearly had issues, and had he “snapped,” he could have certainly done physical harm to either myself and/or to property. I suppose I did not see this as a threat or an act of intimidation at the time because I’ve become accustomed to this type of behavior over the years, but it was clearly an act of intimidation.

I urge you to consider supporting LD 1821, which would be a show of support of the frontline workers and City and Town Clerks who uphold the Election Laws, and do so with integrity each and every Election.

To talk about this further, or gain clarification on something I’ve shared, please feel free to contact me at 284-9307 or by email: carmen.morris@biddefordmaine.org.