



---

## Maine Town & City Clerks' Association

---

Local Government Center • 60 Community Drive  
Augusta, Maine 04330-9486  
1-800-452-8786 (In Maine) • 207-623-8428  
Fax 207-626-5947

Date: February 5, 2019

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

From: Kathy Montejo, Chairperson, Legislative Policy Committee  
Maine Town and City Clerks' Association  
City Clerk, City of Lewiston

Re: LD 245 – An Act To Reestablish a Presidential Primary System in Maine

Position: NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST

The Maine Town & City Clerks' Association conducted a survey of our membership regarding LD 245 and municipal clerks across the state have mixed opinions on this bill. Approximately 27% support it, 52% oppose it and the rest are Neither For Nor Against.

We do have several comments that we would like to bring to the Committee's attention for consideration:

**SUPPORT** - The Clerks who support the bill do so because they heard concerns from voters regarding the logistical operations of the 2016 caucuses. Such issues were limited parking, lack of adequate handicapped parking, insufficient building space or meeting set up, confusion from party volunteers organizing the event and so forth. Some Clerks are supporting the reinstatement of the Presidential Primary election because they feel the voters would be better served with the election-style selection process. They also feel it would eliminate confusion for voters because there is already a state primary election every other June for the selection of other party candidates and it appears confusing to voters to have different selection methods (caucus vs primary) for different offices.

**OPPOSE** – The Clerks who oppose the bill do so for a few reasons:

- 1) Concerns with the timing of the election: Election preparations occur at least 90 days before election day because absentee ballot requests can be received up to three months before an election. This timeframe would be mid-December to mid-March. This is an extremely busy time for municipalities because offices are busy wrapping up and completing several reports from the November election, busy with preparations for town meeting, issuing and verifying municipal nomination

**Representing Over 400 Municipalities**



---

## Maine Town & City Clerks' Association

---

Local Government Center • 60 Community Drive  
Augusta, Maine 04330-9486  
1-800-452-8786 (In Maine) • 207-623-8428  
Fax 207-626-5947

petitions, town budget preparations, annual town report preparation, orientation of newly elected municipal officials, attendance at party caucuses which will still be held to determine state delegates, platforms, local issues, etc., annual school budget election preparation, peak General Assistance applications, biannual tax collection and more. Most of these are state mandated services that cannot be set aside or shirked in duties to meet the requirements of facilitating another election. In many small municipalities, all of these tasks are handled by less than 4 town office employees. Adding in the preparation and administration of a full election will no doubt cause delays in other required duties. It seems extremely inefficient to run an entire election, and all of the related time-consuming election preparations, for the nomination for just one race.

- 2) Concerns with the logistics of running a wintertime election and issues with possible weather related situations: If election day is a snow day for schools, many polling place buildings might be inaccessible, parking lots and sidewalks might not be cleared, citizen election workers might cancel due to travel concerns, Public Works crews will not be available to deliver voting machines, ballots, set up the polls and so forth due to their street snow plowing and many other impacts from a wintertime election. Some towns have changed from a March town meeting/town election to a June town meeting/town election due to past problems with wintertime issues.
- 3) Costs and expenses: Even though the State would provide a majority of the funds to cover this election, there are concerns regarding the municipality's share of the costs for running an election for just one office. If this bill is adopted, there will be three different processes for political party activity and nominations within four months – presidential primary, party caucus and June primary – all of these have to be staffed at costs to the municipal taxpayer. Concerns were also expressed that all municipal taxpayers need to pay for a Presidential Primary when only a limited number of residents can even participate in the event due to their personal choice to not enroll in a political party. It is getting very costly to run elections and to be able to find and train enough workers to operate the polling places. With many voters out of state for the winter or concerned with walking on the snow and ice, the volume of absentee ballots will increase and the associated postage costs.
- 4) Concerns this proposal is a long term fix to a one year problem: Several municipal clerks expressed concerns this bill represents a knee-jerk reaction to problems from three years ago because so many citizens waited until the last minute to register to vote during the 2016 caucuses. Aside from the problems with the 2016 caucuses, the caucus system for the selection of presidential nominees worked



---

## Maine Town & City Clerks' Association

---

Local Government Center • 60 Community Drive  
Augusta, Maine 04330-9486  
1-800-452-8786 (In Maine) • 207-623-8428  
Fax 207-626-5947

well for voters before 1996 and since 2004. Problems from one set of caucuses held in one year should not be cause to change an entire system.

- 5) Low voter participation: In the two previous Presidential Primary elections, the voter turnout was fairly low especially when an incumbent was on the ballot. When an incumbent was not on the ballot, the voter turnout on average in many towns was about 25% or less.

We would like to bring to your attention a main concern from numerous communities regarding the current language in LD 245 that we think should have some additional review and discussion:

Not knowing the election date until 4 or 5 months before election day will be very problematic for most communities. Many towns rent buildings for their polling places and these buildings need to be reserved far in advance to secure the space. In Bangor for instance, the Cross Insurance Center needs to be reserved almost a year in advance of election day because the facility will rent out the space to other organizations. For towns to find out by November 1 the date of a March election will simply be too late to secure the polling site. We would respectfully request the November 1 be moved back to January 1 of the prior year. We realize at that point it will not be known if there are enough candidates to hold the election, as LD 245 noted, but we would rather secure a polling location in January and then cancel it in November than try to book it in November for use in March.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our comments today with the Committee. The Maine Town & City Clerks' Association appreciates the opportunity to share its testimony with the Committee. Should any questions arise, please feel free to contact me at 513-3124 or by email: [kmontejo@lewistonmaine.gov](mailto:kmontejo@lewistonmaine.gov)