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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS**

Testimony of Shenna Bellows Secretary of State  
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*April 09, 2021*

Testifying In Support of  
L.D. 916 “An Act To Protect Data Privacy and Security in Elections”

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Shenna Bellows and I am the Secretary of State and the chief elections officer. I am speaking today in support of L.D. 916 “An Act To Protect Data Privacy and Security in Elections,” which aims to amend Title 21-A, Section 196-A to ensure the personal data of Maine voters is protected and make certain such data is not accessed by the general public on the internet.

This amendment makes three substantive changes to the statute:

1. It clarifies that no entity receiving the voter file may cause information contained in or derived from the data that identifies a specific voter, including the voter’s name, street address, and mailing address, to be made available on the internet in a manner that can be accessed by the general public.
2. It allows restricted access to voter information for organizations seeking to evaluate the state’s compliance with its list maintenance obligations under the National Voter Registration Act.
3. It increases the enforcement authority of the state by attaching fines to violations of the statute.

Securing the privacy of voter information must be at the forefront of election officials when collecting such data. As Secretary of State, I am very invested in and have prioritized this issue because I know unauthorized use of a voter’s personal information runs the risk of potential targeting and manipulation of voters and ultimately, loss in confidence in democratic processes and institutions. According to a 2016 survey conducted by Pew Research 11 percent of unregistered Americans chose not to register to vote citing privacy or security reasons.<sup>1</sup> It is vitally important that we prevent the potential disenfranchisement of voters and not discourage voters from participating in the voting process in any way.

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research, *Why Are Millions of Citizens Not Registered to Vote?* June 21, 2017, available at <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2017/06/why-are-millions-of-citizens-not-registered-to-vote> (last accessed 04/08/2021).

Additionally, we have a solemn obligation to Maine citizens to safeguard that data, to prevent unauthorized disclosure or publication of voter information that might compromise voter security or undermine the integrity of our elections through voter fraud. Increasing the statute's clarity about disclosure and authorized use reduces the danger of inappropriate disclosure or use. Creating a penalty for violation of the statute improves the state's ability to protect the privacy and data security of Maine citizens.

Under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), states are obligated to comply with certain requirements regarding voter lists maintenance and registration.<sup>2</sup> In Maine, we uphold these obligations.<sup>3</sup> In each voter registration file, we maintain the original, signed voter registration application in addition to documents containing changes of name or address and any voter enrolled in the Address Confidentiality Program is excluded from public inspection.<sup>4</sup> The data we house in the central voter registration system is incredibly valuable and should be protected.

By limiting access to voter information to efforts directly related to a candidate or campaign or for purposes directly related to evaluation of list maintenance activities, this bill would decrease the odds potential identity thieves or stalkers would be able to access the data for nefarious reasons. This amendment advances data security and privacy by increasing clarity around disclosure and tools for enforcement. I thank you for your consideration and would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

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<sup>2</sup> 52 U.S.C. § 20507.

<sup>3</sup> 21-A M.R.S. § 161.

<sup>4</sup> 21-A M.R.S. § 172.