



Department of the Secretary of State

Bureau of Corporations, Elections and Commissions

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

February 3, 2025

Testifying In Opposition to

L.D. 234, "An Act to Eliminate Ranked-choice Voting"

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Shenna Bellows, I reside in Manchester, and I am the Secretary of State and chief elections officer in Maine. I am speaking today in opposition to L.D. 234.

Prior to my time in office, I was an original member of the Committee for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV), which worked to pass Maine's ranked choice law, trying repeatedly through the legislative process, and eventually succeeding in passing the law through Maine's citizen initiative process in 2016. Since then, we have gone through four election cycles where we have used ranked choice voting for primary elections for races for the state legislature and governor and for Congressional primary and general elections. Last year, for the first time, we also used ranked choice voting for the presidential primary.

Since its implementation, we have found voters appreciate the option to rank the candidates on their ballots, and that they have found it easy to vote in this manner. As it is exactly how we rank choices on all sorts of things every day – what to make for dinner for our families each night, what music to put on the radio, where to go on vacation – implementing ranked choice for voting was not difficult.

We also feel that voters appreciate the option to vote their heart, rather than having to stress and worry that voting for their favorite candidate in a plurality election may end up helping their least favorite candidate win, that they will have to vote for the lesser of two evils, or that their decision will split the vote. Voter frustration, often found in that plurality voting, does not always accurately reflect the will of the majority; and this is one of the reasons Maine voters chose RCV. Voters should feel and know that their vote matters, and that the elections they participate in result in representation that mirrors the electorate.

On the election administration side, we have not found undue difficulty in conducting elections. We use a simple ballot design with clear instructions on ballot markings and have a number of resources on our website explaining how RCV works. If no candidate wins a majority of votes on Election Night

in the races that have three or more candidates, the ballots and memory devices from each municipality are securely transported to a central tabulation site in Augusta. There, the winner is determined via rounds. And as with any election, being up-front and honest with voters about when they can expect to hear results – perhaps a few days after Election Day, rather than that night – is a vital part of voter confidence in elections.

In both November 2022 and November 2024 we livestreamed the RCV tabulation for Congressional District 2. This resulted in us all being on livestream for three or four days and gave us the opportunity to talk viewers through every step of the process from opening secure boxes of voted ballots, to uploading data from memory devices, to explaining how ballots were being kept secure, to showing how the campaigns sat together to review the accuracy of the tabulations as compared to election night returns, amongst other highlights. We have received much positive feedback for being so transparent with the tabulation process.

A 2021 report by the think tank R Street which studied RCV in Maine ultimately concluded that “the willingness to use rank-ordering by a majority of voters . . . indicate that RCV is not too complicated for voters to understand” and that “the data shows that voters in Maine effectively use the power of RCV to express their preferences by ranking candidates and that the overwhelming majority of ballots accurately reflect those preferences.”

For the above reasons, we oppose L.D. 234. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.