



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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CONNECTICUT STATE JOINT COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTIONS

Testimony by Maine State Representative Anne Haskell In support of HB #6251 AN ACT AUTHORIZING ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION

Senator Slossberg, Representative Caruso and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Government Administration and Elections:

My name is Anne Haskell, and I represent a portion of the city of Portland, Maine in the Maine House of Representatives. I am here today to offer my support for HB 6251, which promotes voter participation by permitting individuals to register and vote on the day of a regular election.

For several years prior to my election, I served as the Deputy Registrar of Voters at various polling places in Portland, so I draw on both my experience as an elected official and as one who has actually registered voters on Election Day.

The most fundamental right and responsibility of citizenship in America is voting for our representatives to government. That right was fought for by brave Americans and remains at the very top of my list of citizen responsibilities to be upheld, protected, and exercised.

I believe that barriers to **voter registration** amount to barriers to **the right to vote**. Not only does this penalize new voters, it denies voting rights to people who have recently moved, or whose voter registration may have been incomplete or lost.

Let me tell you about Election Day Registration in Maine: its history, how it is administered, and its impact.

- How did we come to enact EDR?

In 1973, the Maine Legislature reduced a six month residency requirement to 30 days. When the Maine Supreme Judicial Court reviewed the change, it determined that residency requirement violated the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution. The opinion of the justices declared that the State's only interest is the administrative task of registration. It permitted a registration requirement only to the extent that it is tied to and does not exceed a

reasonable period for completion of registration. After that opinion established that the State's only interest was administrative, the Legislature enacted Election Day Registration, and it has been in place since then.

- What are the administrative safeguards to avoid fraud?

In the last nine days before an election and on Election Day (called the "closed period"), those wishing to register must produce proof of residency and proof of identity. If they cannot provide both, they will vote a "challenged" ballot, which is counted but kept separately so that if the election is close enough to have relied on that vote, the proof can be obtained. Registrars can and should investigate qualifications of any challenged voters after the election and remove voters if they are not qualified. The voter then has the right to exercise due process by appealing the registrar's decision before the next election. The election officials who used the challenge process did not find it time consuming or overly burdensome.

There has never been a substantiated case of voter fraud due to Election Day Registration, according to the Maine Office of the Attorney General's Investigation Division. In the 2004 election, over 751,000 ballots were cast in Maine, and only 464 ballots were challenged. As an example of challenged registrations, I am personally aware of two cases: both were found to be unintentional, where the voter was registered in two towns, but in both cases they had only voted in one town.

- What is the impact?

In 1972, Maine's voter turnout ranked 21st in the country with about 60% of the population voting. After that, since Election Day Registration has been enacted, Maine has ranked in the top ten in the country. Maine ranked second in 2000 and 2004, behind only Minnesota, another state that has Election Day Registration.

MAINE'S VOTER TURNOUT

YEAR	NATIONAL RANKING	PERCENT
1972	21	60.3%
1992	1	73.1%
1996	1	64.1%
2000	2	67.7%
2004	2	73.8%

On a more personal note, let me tell you about a young woman who came to the polls on Stevens Avenue in Portland two years ago when I was serving as the Deputy Registrar at that polling site for the day. It was snowy and cold, and just before the polls closed. She was very pregnant and accompanied by her husband and father-in-law. They had told her she could register that day and vote. She was unsure and hesitant as she approached the table after her husband and father-in-law had gone into the booths to vote. As I guided her through the form, she became more and more excited. She said, "You mean I can really vote today? It's my first time, you know." It was a wonderful moment for me knowing that she was exercising that fundamental right, empowered to be a part of the election just like the rest of her family that day. I helped many other people become voters that day – young people, brand new citizens, new neighbors – but none made the impression on me like that young woman did.

Election Day Registration is a proven tool to provide access to a fundamental cornerstone of democracy – the right and responsibility to cast your vote. I urge you today to vote in favor of allowing the constituents you represent, all of them, to register to vote without artificial barriers. Please support Election Day Registration. Thank you.