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Senate District 15*

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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR MATTHEW POULIOT

Co-Sponsor of LD 231

“An Act To Establish Open Primaries”

Public Hearing: April 12, 2021

Senator Luchini, Representative Caizzo and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs. I am Senator Matt Pouliot and I represent Senate District 15, which consist of the towns of Augusta, China, Oakland, Sidney and Vassalboro. I am here as a co-sponsor to LD 231 “An Act To Establish Open Primaries”

This legislation will allow for semi-open primaries, meaning unenrolled voters would be permitted to cast one ballot in the primary of their choice. Republicans would not be able to vote in Democratic primaries and Democrats would not be able to vote in Republican primaries.

To be fair, my support for LD 231 isn’t simply altruistic. Yes, it is important for unenrolled voters to be permitted to participate in elections for which they pay. Especially considering nearly 70% of general elections are in fact decided in the primary. These voters deserve a say.

Some have tried to make the argument that an unenrolled voter could enroll in a party for presidential primary day in March and then unenroll and cast a ballot for another party candidate in the June primary. That may have been possible this past year because of the executive order that changed the June primary to July, but under normal times, it would be impossible for this to happen, as statute does not allow an individual to change parties this quickly.

A common refrain is that this will cause people to show up to vote in a primary for a weaker candidate to try to get that person on the ballot instead of a stronger candidate that may fare better in the general election. I think this is a reasonable concern, but the data does not support this actually happening in states where unenrolled voters are allowed to participate.

I am a lifelong Republican, and continue to be proud of the conservative traditions that drew me to the party: less government involvement and oversight, more free-market capitalism, and a personal commitment to help neighbors and friends regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum.

In Maine, unenrolled voters currently outnumber Republicans (32% vs. 28%). Now more than ever, Republicans need to engage with unenrolled voters in order to continue building our base. I assume my friends across the aisle are saying the same thing, so inaction is not an option for us. I believe this legislation will give both parties an opportunity to engage more voters, voters who may or may not choose to eventually join a party.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important initiative.