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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

*May 10, 2023*

Testifying In Opposition to

L.D. 1869, "An Act to Prohibit the Private Funding of Elections "

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica 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 opposition to L.D. 1869.

This is another bill where the underlying intent may seem innocuous, but the impact – which is what we oppose – will result in sowing disinformation about our elections here in Maine. We have already talked about how this committee has previously heard false statements made about how our state and federal elections are funded. As a reminder, our elections are funded through two sources – appropriations we receive from the Maine State Legislature and federal grants.

To receive funding from our either source, we must undergo an extensive process. This committee is familiar with the state budget process because you all play a part in the process – since every single one of our election initiatives come before this committee to be debated and discussed.

Federal funding we receive also requires our Elections Division to go through several steps and even after we receive the allocation, there are reporting requirements that obligate us to keep the federal government informed of how we use any money given to us. These checks are put in place to ensure states are appropriately applying funds that are given to the states.

The Elections Division has never accepted funding from private, partisan sources to conduct state and federal elections and will never do so. Again, while the underlying intent of this bill may be benign the way elections are discussed is very important and any suggestion of fraud or malfeasance – where there is none – is incredibly dangerous.

For the above reasons, we oppose L.D. 1805. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.