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Secretary of State

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OREGON STATE LEGISLATURE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY AND BALLOT MEASURE 110 IMPLEMENTATION

S.B. 571, “Relating to Voting By Adults in Custody”

Testimony In Support Provided by Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State of Maine

February 24, 2021

Dear Chairman Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today in support of Senate Bill 571, which strengthens an individual’s constitutional right to vote.

My name is Shenna Bellows, I am Maine’s 50th Secretary of State and the chief elections officer and chief motor vehicles official for the great state of Maine.

In Maine, we believe democracy is stronger when it represents everyone, and when everyone can participate. S.B. 571 is critical because it *re-enfranchises* the voices of individuals who may otherwise feel disconnected from their community and state and puts an end to a policy rooted in racism dating back to the Jim Crow era.¹ Additionally, this bill largely follows what has already proven to work in states like Maine and Vermont.²

Article II of the Maine State Constitution makes explicit that *all* United States citizens, age 18 or older, who are residents of the State of Maine have a right to vote.

“Section 1. Qualifications of electors; written ballot; military servicemen; students. Every citizen of the United States of the age of 18 years and upwards, excepting persons under guardianship for reasons of mental illness, having his or her

¹ Taylor, Jennifer Rae, *Jim Crow’s Lasting Legacy at the Ballot Box*, The Marshall Project, Aug. 20, 2008, available at <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/08/20/jim-crow-s-lasting-legacy-at-the-ballot-box>.

² Board, Riley, *What does an election look like inside a prison?* Burlington Free Press, Aug. 24, 2020, available at <https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/08/24/vermont-inmates-can-vote-how-elections-prison-mail-in-ballot/3326694001/>.

residence established in this State, shall be an elector for Governor, Senators and Representatives, in the city, town or plantation where his or her residence has been established, if he or she continues to reside in this State; and the elections shall be by written ballot.” – Maine State Constitution, Article II

Maine citizens never lose their right to vote, even upon conviction or incarceration. People in prison or jail in Maine may register to vote from their place of residence prior to incarceration and may cast an absentee ballot. This is facilitated by voter registration drives at the Maine State Prison and procedures to facilitate absentee voting by incarcerated persons.

The constitutional guarantee to the right to vote eliminates confusion: when the same set of rules apply to all people regardless of background or circumstance, then there is less opportunity for discriminatory or prejudicial treatment. Similarly, universal franchise strengthens civic participation. A person who is incarcerated maintains closer ties to the community to which they will return after incarceration if they are able to continue to have a vote in who represents them.

The power in a democracy rightly resides with the people – no matter where they cast their ballot from. I strongly urge this Committee to support this bill and I am happy to answer any questions.