

**Maine Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
Written Testimony of Natalie E. Tennant, Manager for State Advocacy,  
Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law  
on  
LD 1463 “An Act to Create an Automatic Voter Registration System”  
May 10, 2019**

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Natalie Tennant, Manager for State Advocacy at the Brennan Center for Justice and former Secretary of State of West Virginia. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on LD 1463, “An Act to Create An Automatic Voter Registration System.” We strongly support this effort to bring automatic voter registration to Maine and write specifically, to recommend some simple and modest revisions to this important legislation.

The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law is a nonpartisan law and policy institute that seeks to improve our systems of democracy and justice.<sup>1</sup> We work with state and local election officials across the country and with legislators at all levels of government to improve and reform election administration practices. We have worked to advance automatic registration, known as AVR, since 2007 through research, legislative advocacy, and public education and are considered the original architect of AVR.<sup>2</sup>

Automatic voter registration is a common-sense reform that has been widely adopted in the past few years—with strong bipartisan support in a number of states. Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have now adopted automatic voter registration, and more than one-third of Americans live in a jurisdiction that has enacted the policy.<sup>3</sup>

In Maine, AVR would streamline the process for collecting and transmitting the voter registration data electronically to election officials, rather than via a paper application. This could cut down the multi-stepped, paper-based process that is labor intensive and inefficient.

While we enthusiastically support AVR, there is a handful of simple recommendations we suggest:

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<sup>1</sup> This testimony does not purport to express the views, if any, of New York University School of Law.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Brennan Center for Justice, *The Case for Automatic Voter Registration* (2016), available at [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Case\\_for\\_Automatic\\_Voter\\_Registration.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/Case_for_Automatic_Voter_Registration.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> See “Automatic Voter Registration,” Brennan Center for Justice, last modified November 7, 2018, <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration>.

- A. The declination take place at the point of service and remove the unnecessary, additional step of a back-end process. This would avoid additional printing, postage and labor costs for municipal registrars, who would have to mail out notifications.
- B. Avoiding the additional 21-day waiting period by providing the opt-out opportunity at the point of service.
- C. Making sure people who should opt-out because they are ineligible or have special privacy concerns do not register by having the interaction at the point of service. This real-time interaction ensures that each person selects the choice that's right for them and provides a resource for those who need additional help.
- D. Providing voters with the opportunity to participate in Maine's closed primaries by giving them the chance to affiliate with a party during the transaction.
- E. Ensuring federal law compliance that a voter attest to her eligibility to vote and provide a signature which is easily done at the point of service transaction.
- F. The Secretary of State be given authority to determine the expansion of AVR at other source agencies. This allows the Secretary to evaluate whether an agency already collects documents sufficient to provide proof of voter eligibility, whether it has compatible data formats, and whether it can electronically transfer the required data to election officials.

We believe these revisions would offer clearer direction for AVR implementation and would save money and reduce erroneous registrations.

The Brennan Center recently released a report that shows automatic voter registration has been successful at increasing the number of eligible Americans who are registered to vote everywhere it has been implemented.<sup>4</sup> AVR also increases registration irrespective of whether individuals can opt out during their transaction with an agency, or upon receiving a notice of registration by mail after their transaction.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the committee through this document. We are available for further discussions at your convenience.

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<sup>4</sup> See *AVR Impact on State Voter Registration* (2019), available at [https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019\\_04\\_AVR\\_Report\\_Final\\_0.pdf](https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019_04_AVR_Report_Final_0.pdf).