

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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129th MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2019

Legislative Document

No. 534

H.P. 391

House of Representatives, January 31, 2019

**An Act To Make Ballot Questions Easier To Read and Understand
for Maine Voters**

(EMERGENCY)

Reference to the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "R B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative ANDREWS of Paris.
Cosponsored by Senator LUCHINI of Hancock and
Representatives: DILLINGHAM of Oxford, HICKMAN of Winthrop, MOONEN of Portland,
PICKETT of Dixfield, STEWART of Presque Isle, STROM of Pittsfield, Senators: KEIM of
Oxford, LIBBY of Androscoggin.

1 **Emergency preamble. Whereas,** acts and resolves of the Legislature do not
2 become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

3 **Whereas,** the ability of voters to make informed choices on ballot questions is
4 essential for the proper functioning of the State's citizen democracy; and

5 **Whereas,** this Act makes necessary improvements to the process of presenting
6 referendum questions to the voters; and

7 **Whereas,** it is possible that referenda may be sent to the voters before the 90-day
8 period has expired; and

9 **Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within
10 the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as
11 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now,
12 therefore,

13 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

14 **Sec. 1. 21-A MRSA §906, sub-§6, ¶B,** as repealed and replaced by PL 1993, c.
15 352, §3, is amended to read:

16 B. The Secretary of State shall write the question in a simple, clear, concise and
17 direct manner that describes the subject matter of the people's veto or direct initiative.
18 The question must have a readability score, as determined by a recognized instrument
19 for measuring adult literacy levels, equivalent to no higher than a 6th-grade reading
20 level and unambiguously state what the effect of a "yes" or "no" vote may have.

21 **Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this
22 legislation takes effect when approved.

23 **SUMMARY**

24 This bill requires that ballot questions be written in a manner that is understandable to
25 the greatest number of voters possible, determined to be for adult literacy at the 6th-grade
26 reading level, which is the standard used for other important official state documents,
27 including for the Maine Residents Property Tax Program, notices regarding child support,
28 municipal property tax deferral programs for seniors and temporary assistance for needy
29 families. This bill also requires ballot questions to unambiguously state what the effect of
30 a "yes" or "no" vote may have.