

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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119th MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-1999

Legislative Document

No. 2176

S.P. 777

In Senate, April 13, 1999

**An Act to Prohibit State Government from Using Automated Telephone
Answering Equipment During Business Hours.**

(AFTER DEADLINE)

(EMERGENCY)

Approved for introduction by a majority of the Legislative Council pursuant to Joint Rule
205.

Reference to the Committee on State and Local Government suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joy J. O'Brien".

JOY J. O'BRIEN
Secretary of the Senate

Presented by Senator KIEFFER of Aroostook.
Cosponsored by Representative MAYO of Bath and
Senators: BENNETT of Oxford, GOLDTHWAIT of Hancock, MICHAUD of Penobscot,
NUTTING of Androscoggin, Representatives: CAMERON of Rumford, MURPHY of
Kennebunk, SAXL of Portland, TRUE of Fryeburg.

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

4
6 **Whereas,** the people of the State need from time to time to
contact state agencies because of problems or concerns that the
people may have; and

8
10 **Whereas,** often when a person calls a state agency with a
problem or concern, that person needs to talk to an individual,
and it is not necessarily convenient or practical for that person
12 to leave a message or to follow an electronic menu with options;
and

14
16 **Whereas,** the purpose of state agencies is to serve the
people of the State in a manner that is as accessible, efficient
and responsive as possible; and

18
20 **Whereas,** when a person calls a state agency with a problem
or concern and receives an automated operator or electronic menu
instead of a live operator, often that person is not able to
22 adequately receive assistance or services for the person's
problem or concern, making that person disenchanted and upset; and

24
26 **Whereas,** when a person calls a state agency with a problem
or concern and receives an automated operator or electronic menu
instead of a live operator, the person receives a bad impression
28 of the State, and the State receives a bad reputation; and

30 **Whereas,** the number of people calling a state agency and not
getting the assistance or services they are entitled to because
32 the state agency does not have a live operator answering incoming
telephone calls grows by the day; and

34
36 **Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts
create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of
Maine and require the following legislation as immediately
38 necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and
safety; now, therefore,

40
42 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

44 **Sec. 1. 5 MRSA §54 is enacted to read:**

46 **§54. Automated telephone answering equipment**

48 An agency shall have a live operator answer all incoming
telephone calls to the agency during the business hours of the
agency. The operator may direct an incoming call to voice mail
50 or another automated answering service after the incoming call is

2 initially answered. This section does not apply to an incoming
3 telephone call to a telephore line that is dedicated as a hot
4 line for emergency servives or to provide general information.
5 "Agency" has the same meaning as defined in section 43.

6 **Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the
7 preamble, this Act takes effect when approved.

8
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10

SUMMARY

11 This bill requires state agencies and departments to have a
12 live operator answer all incoming telephone calls to the agency
13 or department during business hours except for emergency hot
14 lines and telephone lines that provide general information.