

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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131st MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2023

Legislative Document

No. 812

H.P. 501

House of Representatives, February 21, 2023

**An Act to Assist Clerks in Facilitating Elections and to Improve
Access to In-person Absentee Voting for Working People by
Increasing Time for Absentee Ballot Processing and In-person
Voting**

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

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

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative SKOLD of Portland.
Cosponsored by Senator BRENNER of Cumberland and
Representatives: ABDI of Lewiston, COLLINGS of Portland, DHALAC of South Portland,
KUHN of Falmouth, RANA of Bangor, ROEDER of Bangor, SAYRE of Kennebunk, Senator:
DUSON of Cumberland.

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

2 **Sec. 1. 21-A MRSA §753-B, sub-§8**, as amended by PL 2021, c. 273, §21, is
3 further amended by enacting a new first blocked paragraph to read:

4 In a municipality with a population greater than 7,000, the clerk shall provide an
5 opportunity for absentee voting in the presence of the clerk for at least 8 hours on one
6 Saturday and 8 hours on one Sunday within 18 days before the date of the election.

7 **Sec. 2. 21-A MRSA §753-B, sub-§8-A** is enacted to read:

8 **8-A. Grants for certain municipalities.** The Secretary of State shall provide grants
9 for the purpose of expanding the hours available for absentee voting in the presence of a
10 clerk of:

11 A. Up to \$50,000 per year to municipalities with a population greater than 7,000; and

12 B. Up to \$40,000 per year to municipalities with a population less than or equal to
13 7,000 that provide an opportunity for absentee voting in the presence of a clerk for at
14 least 8 hours on one Saturday and at least 8 hours on one Sunday within 18 days before
15 the date of an election.

16 The Secretary of State shall adopt rules to implement this subsection. Rules adopted
17 pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375,
18 subchapter 2-A.

19 **Sec. 3. 21-A MRSA §760-B, first ¶**, as amended by PL 2021, c. 11, §1, is further
20 amended to read:

21 Any municipality or jurisdiction that conducts its own elections may opt to process
22 absentee ballots beginning on the ~~7th~~ 14th day immediately prior to election day. The clerk
23 shall use the following procedure when processing the absentee ballots during this time.

24 **Sec. 4. 21-A MRSA §760-B, sub-§3**, as amended by PL 2019, c. 371, §38, is
25 further amended to read:

26 **3. Inspection of absentee envelopes before processing.** A member of the public may
27 make a written request of the clerk to inspect absentee ballot applications and envelopes
28 before they are processed if the request is made by ~~9:00 a.m. on each~~ 5:00 p.m. of the day
29 before the day that the clerk will process absentee ballots as specified on the notice of early
30 processing under subsection 2. The clerk shall make the absentee ballot applications and
31 envelopes received by that time available for public inspection for one hour before the
32 starting time specified in the notice of early processing for processing the absentee ballots.
33 The clerk may immediately proceed to process the ballots after the one-hour inspection
34 time has elapsed.

35 SUMMARY

36 This bill allows 14 days for the processing of absentee ballots instead of 7 as in current
37 law, adjusts the hours for a member of the public to make a written request of the clerk to
38 inspect ballot applications and envelopes before they are processed, requires a municipality
39 with a population greater than 7,000 to provide an opportunity for absentee voting in the
40 presence of a clerk for at least 8 hours on one Saturday and 8 hours on one Sunday in the
41 18 days before the date of an election and requires the Secretary of State to provide grants

1 to certain municipalities for the purpose of expanding the hours available for absentee
2 voting in the presence of a clerk.