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An Act To Provide for a Method To Remove an Elected Municipal Official

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

Whereas, municipalities conduct official business that must be attended to on a daily basis, mostly by a small group of municipal officials; and

Whereas, many small municipalities do not have sufficient charters or ordinances to respond timely to misconduct or malfeasance by their municipal officials; and

Whereas, misconduct or malfeasance by an official in a small municipality that does not have the legal means to address the issue can directly affect the ability of the municipality to conduct its official business, which has a negative effect on the public interest and is of a direct concern to the State; and

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 necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

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

Sec. 1. 30-A MRSA §2505 is enacted to read:

§ 2505. Recall of municipal officials

Except as otherwise provided by the municipality's ordinances or charter, an elected official of a municipality may be recalled from office pursuant to this section. For purposes of this section, "official" has the same meaning as section 2604, subsection 2.

1. Petition for recall. On the written petition pursuant to subsection 5 of a number of voters equal to at least 10% of the number of votes cast in the municipality at the last gubernatorial election, an election must be held to determine the recall of an elected official of that municipality.

2. Notice of intention. In order to initiate a recall election under subsection 1, the initiator of the petition shall file a notice of intention of recall with the municipal clerk of the municipality. A notice of intention of recall under this subsection must include the name, address and contact information of the person filing the notice and the name and position of the official subject to recall under this section. Only a person registered to vote in the municipality may file a notice of intention of recall under this subsection.

3. Petition forms. Within 3 business days of receipt of a notice of intention of recall under subsection 2, the municipal clerk shall prepare petition forms for the collection of signatures under subsection 4 and send notice to the initiator of the petition under subsection 2 that the petition forms are available. The municipality may charge the initiator of the petition a reasonable fee for preparing and providing the petition forms under this subsection. A petition form under this subsection must include:

A. At the top of the form, the name and position of the official subject to recall, the name and contact information of the initiator of the petition and the date by which the signatures must be submitted to the municipal clerk under subsection 4;

B. Spaces for each voter's signature, actual street address and printed name; and

C. Space at the bottom of the form for the name, address and signature of the person circulating the petition form.

4. Collection and submission of signatures. A petition form under subsection 3 may be circulated or signed only by a registered voter of the municipality. A circulator of a petition form shall fill in the information required under subsection 3, paragraph C and sign the form prior to submission of the form to the municipal clerk. The initiator of the petition under subsection 2 shall collect the petition forms from all circulators and submit the signed petition forms to the municipal clerk within 14 days of receipt of notice from the clerk that the petition forms are available under subsection 3. A municipal clerk may not accept a petition form submitted more than 14 days after sending notice of availability to the initiator under subsection 3, and any voter signatures on that form are invalid.

5. Petition certification and notification. Within 7 business days of receiving petition forms under subsection 4, the municipal clerk shall determine whether the petition forms meet the criteria under subsection 4 and certify the validity of any signatures on the petition forms. If the municipal clerk finds that the number of valid signatures submitted under subsection 4 meets or exceeds the requirements under subsection 1, the clerk shall certify the petition and immediately send notification of the certification to the municipal officers, the initiator of the petition and the official subject to the recall. If the municipal clerk finds the number of valid signatures submitted under subsection 4 does not meet the requirements for a petition under subsection 1, the municipal clerk shall file the petition and the petition forms in the clerk's office and notify the initiator of the petition.

6. Scheduling recall election. Within 10 business days of certification of the petition under subsection 5, the municipal officers shall schedule a recall election to determine whether the official subject to the recall petition should be recalled. The election must be held no less than 45 days nor more than 75 days after certification of the petition under subsection 5 unless a regular municipal election is scheduled to be held within 90 days of the certification of the petition under subsection 5, in which case the recall election must be held on the date of the regular municipal election. If the municipal officers fail to schedule a recall election within 10 days of certification of the recall petition under subsection 5, the municipal clerk shall schedule the recall election pursuant to the date requirements of this subsection.

7. Ballots for recall election. If the official subject to the recall does not resign from office within 10 business days of certification of the recall petition under subsection 5, the ballots for the recall election under subsection 6 must be printed. A ballot for a recall election under this section must read:

"Do you authorize the recall of (name of official) from the position of (name of office)?

( ) Yes ( ) No"

8. Results of recall election.   Within 2 business days of a recall election under subsection 6, the municipal clerk shall certify and record the election results and notify the municipal officers of those results. If a majority of voters vote to remove the official, the recall takes effect on the date the election results are recorded pursuant to this subsection.

9. Limitation of recall.   An elected official may be the subject of a recall petition under this section only if the official is convicted of a crime, the conduct of which occurred during the official's term of office and the victim of which is the municipality.

Sec. 2. 30-A MRSA §2602, sub-§1, ¶F, as enacted by PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 and Pt. C, §106 and amended by PL 1989, c. 6; c. 9, §2; and c. 104, Pt. C, §§8 and 10, is further amended to read:

F. Failure to qualify for the office within 10 days after written demand by the municipal officers; ~~or~~

Sec. 3. 30-A MRSA §2602, sub-§1, ¶G, as enacted by PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. A, §2 and Pt. C, §106 and amended by PL 1989, c. 6; c. 9, §2; and c. 104, Pt. C, §§8 and 10, is further amended to read:

G. Failure of the municipality to elect a person to office~~.~~; or

Sec. 4. 30-A MRSA §2602, sub-§1, ¶H is enacted to read:

H. Recall pursuant to section 2505.

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

Effective 90 days following adjournment of the 125th
Legislature, First Regular Session, unless otherwise indicated.