



FACTSHEET | Secretary Bellows is Fighting Transparency and Restricting Speech about Errors in Maine's Elections

PILF sued Maine Secretary of State, Shenna Bellows to obtain the voter roll and knock down the state's use restrictions that would prohibit discussing errors found on the voter roll.

- In October 2019, PILF requested a copy of Maine's statewide voter roll. The Secretary of State's office notified PILF that the request was denied because state law limited access to certain preferred entities.
- In February 2020, PILF filed a federal lawsuit under the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NVRA).
- To moot PILF's case, Maine amended its law to allow access to the voter roll, but with use restrictions.
 - The restrictions prohibit using the voter roll for evaluating anything other than Maine's compliance with its voter list maintenance obligations.
 - For example, the new law prohibited PILF from comparing Maine's roll to New York's to identify duplicate registrations across state lines.
 - Maine also prohibits PILF from reporting and educating on specific entries in Maine's voter roll.
 - Violation of the use restrictions would risk severe fines and penalties.
- PILF amended its complaint to challenge the use restrictions and fines.
- The U.S. District Court [ruled](#) in PILF's favor that the NVRA prohibits these fines and use restrictions on Maine's voter roll. Maine appealed this decision to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

By appealing the lower court's ruling, Secretary of State Shenna Bellows continues to fight transparency in Maine's elections.

- Maine's restrictions on the use of voter roll data are obstacles to achieving Congress' intent for transparency and accountability under the NVRA.

- Previously, PILF has filed NVRA lawsuits to obtain states' voter rolls and won in [Maryland](#) and [Illinois](#).
 - Thanks to these wins, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has adopted PILF's position that voter rolls are public records under the NVRA.
 - The DOJ filed an [amicus curiae](#) brief before the First Circuit Court of Appeals supporting PILF's right to obtain Maine's voter roll.
- Involved in the drafting of Maine's use restrictions law was the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC).
 - EPIC waged a legal campaign to block the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity's access to states' voter rolls for research comparisons.
 - Other groups involved in writing the legislation were Maine Secretary of State staffers and the top lobbyist for the Democratic Party.

Maine's law penalizes speech that is critical of the state's election officials. Not only is this un-American, but it also infringes on First Amendment rights and violates the NVRA.

- The NVRA prohibits states from chilling speech about election administration by imposing fines and use restrictions on government documents.
- Maine has given the government the power to sanction those who discover that officials aren't doing an effective job in running elections.
 - Americans should not face fines or lawsuits for speaking about failures in election administration.
 - The only people who benefit from Maine's speech restrictions are the government officials who are protected from critics.
- This law is part of a troubling, growing trend by states to dictate how concerned citizens may research voter rolls while acting under their NVRA inspection rights.

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Prior case filings in *Public Interest Legal Foundation v. Shenna Bellows* and documents can be found [here](#).