



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Opposition to:
LD 34: An Act to Require a Person to Show Photographic Identification for the Purpose of Voting**

Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
State House, Room 437
Monday, February 6, 2023

Good morning, Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

This bill aims to change Maine voting law by requiring voters to provide photo identification. At MPHA, we support making voting accessible, secure, and equitable for all eligible voters in Maine. We believe ensuring that all eligible voters can cast their ballots fairly and equitably is a public health priority, given associations with health equity and health outcomes. We are concerned the provisions in this bill will contribute to voter suppression and will limit voting access for eligible voters in Maine. We also believe there is insufficient evidence to support the need for this provision or that requiring identification improves election security. On the contrary, accessible voting policies do support election integrity.

In 1988, the Institute of Medicine published a landmark report, [*The Future of Public Health*](#), which acknowledges that voting is a public health issue because it helps shape “the conditions in which people can be healthy.” [The American Public Health Association considers voting to be a public health issue](#) because it impacts civic policies ranging from budgets to carrying firearms to insurance and LGBTQ rights. The [Health and Democracy Index](#) analysis also demonstrates that “communities with high voter participation enjoy greater social cohesion and belonging and better health.”

[According to Dr. Edward Ehlinger](#), past-president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO), voting directly impacts health: “Research conducted in 44 countries showed that civic participation, specifically [voter participation, was associated with better self-reported health](#)—while another study showed that those who did not vote reported poorer health outcomes. Historically, we can see this trend play out via suffrage and voting rights. While other factors were of course at play, it was after women got the right to vote in 1920 that the maternal and infant mortality rates dropped dramatically. This can be attributed to the passage of the Sheppard Towner Act of 1921, which set up maternal and child health units in every state health

department, expanded collection of birth and death data, and began federal funding of state health programs. Similarly, when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed, infant mortality rates dropped and the Black/white disparity in those rates narrowed, again because of legislation that was passed in response to new voter enfranchisement.”

Specific to this bill, some individuals may experience barriers to having photo identification, including persons experiencing homelessness, people with low-income, older adults, persons with disabilities, people who oppose having their photo taken due to religious or cultural beliefs, and non-white populations.¹ Voter identification laws are indeed considered restrictive and exclusive in the [Cost of Voting Index](#), which refers to the time and effort associated with casting a vote.

We respect wanting to ensure election security. However, we believe we can ensure election security while also ensuring all eligible Maine voters are able to cast their ballots fairly and equitably. We believe accessible elections are essential to protecting and promoting public health. Currently, Maine is a national leader in voter accessibility. We are proud of that leadership. We respectfully request you vote LD 34 “ought not to pass.” Thank you for your consideration.

¹Government Accountability Office (GAO). Issues related to state voter identification laws. September 2014. GAO Report to Congressional Requesters. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-14-634>.