

Re: LD 1356, An Act to **Improve** the Local Referendum Process by Increasing the Percentage of the Population Required to Submit a Local Referendum Question (Bold added)

My name is Lawrence T. Lonegan and I am a resident of North Yarmouth. This testimony is submitted in OPPOSITION to LD1356 which I am of the opinion would be better titled "An Act To **Oppress** the Local Referendum Process....." (Bold added)

Increasing the percentage for 10% to 15% is a 50% increase in the number of signatures required which increases the burden for those members of a community who are utilizing this tool of our democracy to seek change sought but not recognized by their elected officials.

In a small community such as North Yarmouth signatures are not as easily obtained as they would be in a larger community such as Portland. As an example, consider their population density. Per Wikipedia, the 2020 density of North Yarmouth is 192 per sq. mile vs. 3,175 per sq. mile for Portland. To protect this democracy tool, the percentage of 10% for towns like North Yarmouth should be retained.

In this testimony I would like to critique some of the points put forward by the bills sponsor, Rep. Anne Graham, who also in a resident of North Yarmouth, specific to the Referendum voted on via special election 3/15/2022:

1. Rep. Graham raises a cost of \$7,500 as if it is a significant amount to the town which had real estate taxes of \$9,759,135 per the FY 2022 Real Estate Tax Commitment Book.
2. Rep. Graham says the referendum was "a poorly understood ballot initiative". Certainly it would have been poorly understood if it was presented as one paragraph as it was in her testimony. But it wasn't. It was presented clearly with multiple paragraphs resulting in an excellent visual of the ballot initiative.
3. Rep. Graham says that it was a complex residential planning issue. No it was not; the referendum was a direct response to excessive and uncontrolled growth resulting from poor planning. Given that there was (and continues to be) severe overcrowding in MSAD 51 which North Yarmouth is part of, the Select Board did not issue a moratorium as called for in the Land Use Ordinance. The extent of this severe overcrowding is witnessed by MSAD 51's proposed budget for FY2024 which includes \$2,050,000 for Temporary Space (Modular Buildings etc.).
4. Rep. Graham says "our typical voter turnout is often greater than 75%". I am not aware of her source, but information presented by the North Yarmouth town clerk does not support her statement. Information for 2021 and 2022 indicate that there were six elections and two annual

town meetings. Turnout for the six elections were: 17%, 27%, 50%, 36%, 35%, and 73%. Turnout for the two annual town meetings were 5% and 3%. The 73% election was headlined by the Governor's race, and the 50% by the Electric Line Ban. The next highest, 36%, was applicable to the referendum that Rep. Graham refers to - obviously a presentable turnout in comparison to the others.

I am dismayed and tremendously disappointed by the testimony presented by Rep. Graham, and certainly it does not justify the passing/approval of this bill.

Hopefully the committee will concur and not approve LD 1356.

Respectfully submitted,

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