



Testimony in Opposition to LD 734:

“An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine's High Schools”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to LD 734.

LD 734 proposes formalizing and expanding voter registration opportunities for high school students within Maine's public school system. While we recognize the importance of civic engagement and voter participation, we have significant concerns about the unintended consequences of this bill, particularly concerning election integrity, government overreach, and the political neutrality of public education.

Government Overreach in the Election Process

LD 734 seeks to insert government-mandated voter registration into Maine's high schools, an unnecessary expansion of state involvement in a process that should remain the responsibility of individuals and families.

Maine already provides ample opportunities for voter registration, including pre-registration for 16- and 17-year-olds¹ and same-day registration on Election Day.² Maine also already has one of the highest youth voter turnout rates in the country.³ Given these facts, it is unclear why additional government intervention is needed.

This bill would place additional administrative burdens on schools—institutions primarily tasked with education—by requiring them to facilitate voter registration, a process best handled best by election officials and municipal clerks.

Election Integrity Concerns

The integrity of our elections depends on a registration system that ensures only eligible voters are added to the rolls. Expanding registration into high schools raises several questions about the verification process.

- Who will verify students' eligibility, particularly regarding citizenship requirements?

¹ <https://registertovote.sos.maine.gov/OnlineVoterRegistration/Registration>

² <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/voter-info/videotranscript.html>

³ <https://circle.tufts.edu/latest-research/state-state-youth-voter-turnout-data-and-impact-election-laws-2022>



- What safeguards will be in place to prevent errors, such as duplicate or inaccurate registrations?
- Could there be unintentional pressure on students to register regardless of their readiness or understanding of voting responsibilities?

These concerns underscore why voter registration should remain a deliberate, individual action rather than an institutionalized process within schools.

Preserving Political Neutrality in Schools

Public schools should be places of learning, not political advocacy. While encouraging civic engagement is valuable, LD 734 could open the door for undue influence—intentional or not—on students in a captive environment. The presence of teachers, administrators, or external organizations in the voter registration process creates the potential for biased messaging, even if unintentional. Furthermore, classrooms are already becoming increasingly politicized, and this would only further spur this growing problem.⁴

Students should be free to develop their political beliefs independently rather than being guided by institutions that should remain neutral in political matters. Instead of embedding voter registration within schools, the state should ensure that schools focus on civics education, equipping students with the knowledge to make informed choices when registering to vote and, one day, casting a ballot.

Individual Responsibility vs. State Mandates

Maine Policy Institute firmly believes that voter registration should remain a personal responsibility, not a government-facilitated process in high schools. If students are genuinely engaged in the political process, they will take the necessary steps to register and vote when ready. Encouraging individual agency and responsibility in civic participation is more valuable than government-imposed registration efforts.

A Precedent for Further Election Law Changes

This bill also sets a precedent for more controversial election reforms, such as automatic voter registration, same-day registration expansions, and even lowering the voting age. While some proponents of LD 734 may argue that it is a benign effort to increase

⁴ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2022/11/30/political-conflict-increases-in-schools/10789797002/>



participation, recent history shows that incremental changes in election law often lead to broader shifts that compromise election security.⁵

Maine has one of the highest voter participation rates in the country, even without measures like those proposed in LD 734.⁶ Expanding state intervention in voter registration is unjustified when individuals already have ample opportunities to register independently.

Conclusion

For these reasons, Maine Policy Institute strongly urges the committee to oppose LD 734. Instead of embedding voter registration within high schools, policymakers should focus on strengthening civics education, ensuring that Maine's future voters understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship before engaging in the electoral process. Thank you for your time and consideration.

⁵ In Georgia prior to the 2024 election, many had concern that seemingly large changes to electoral process might lead to chaos and delayed results in the presidential election.
<https://apnews.com/article/georgia-state-election-board-trump-certification-results-e57ac093c90acfff26fea04db91d04df>

⁶ <https://mainemorningstar.com/2024/11/27/maine-voter-turnout-this-year-surpassed-previous-record-high/>