

TESTIOMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 734

AN ACT TO PROMOTE VOTER REGISTRATION FOR STUDENTS IN MAINE'S HIGH SCHOOLS

March 11, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Steven Bailey, executive director for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 734.

What may seem to be a good idea has limitations and concerns that lead both the MSSA and MSBA legislative committees to urge the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee to vote “ought not to pass” on L.D. 734, An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine’s High Schools.

Schools across Maine are already leaders in civic engagement efforts, and we are proud of student involvement in the electoral process, which serves as a valuable learning experience. In previous elections, students have even filled valuable positions as poll workers, receiving on-the-job experience about our civic process.

However, this proposal is another legislative mandate that we expect would lead to substantial expense, both in terms of materials and staff time.

The first requirement in this bill is for each secondary school to designate a school employee as a voter registration drive coordinator (though it does allow this to be handled by a 3rd party outside organization). To require this in every school – even small, rural high schools – would pull employees away from other valuable duties supporting our students and ensuring the smooth operation of our school buildings. The goals of this bill are noble, but many schools simply do not have the capacity for this work.

In addition, the opportunity to pre-register to vote exists now for students ages 16 and 17, and to register for 18-year-olds in a variety of ways – online, in person, or by mail.

While MSSA and MSBA legislative committees encourage civic engagement, this becomes one more requirement in a very, ever-expanding list of mandates the schools are expected to pick up as a responsibility of our democratic society.

All of these activities could be happening without this bill being passed, should a school district choose to make this happen. We request that you not make this a mandate and vote no on L.D. 734, An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine’s High Schools.