

TO: The Honorable Joseph Rafferty
The Honorable Kelly Murphy
Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

DATE: March 11, 2025

RE: LD 734 - An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine's High Schools

Dear Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy,

My name is Carolyn Kinney. I am a resident of North Belgrade, and a sophomore at the University of Maine at Farmington, earning my degree in Political Science and Biology (pre-medical track) with a minor in Legal Studies. I am writing today as a member of LWVME's Youth Council. This program helps young people to explore how Maine's government works and build their civic leadership skills. I am in favor of LD 734, and urge that you vote "Ought To Pass" on this bill.

Civic engagement for myself and my community composes a foundation piece of who I am today. In celebration of Election Day 2024, I organized an "Election Buffet" with an array of different foods and corresponding civic engagement puns (i.e. apple cider: "Your vote could be the de-cider.") Through this table, I registered and spoke with about 150 individuals on my campus to vote, ranging from students to faculty and community members.

Prior to the event, I was under the impression that those who were planning to vote were already registered; it is a common assumption that this occurs upon eligibility. To my surprise, I assumed incorrectly. From the 150 people I spoke with, many Mainers whom this was their first election, a majority were not registered due to their confusion and intimidation over how. These emotions acted as a barrier to my community members exercising their right to vote. I believe that if Voter Registration was promoted in high schools, there would have been far less confusion surrounding voter registration due to the nonpartisan guidance of teachers and resources for education.

Through voter registration promotion in schools, I am confident the amount of people whom I registered would have decreased significantly. Being able to register in a school setting may help alleviate intimidation. As noted earlier, it is expected that when individuals are of eligibility to vote, they understand and have the resources to do so. However, as I saw with my Election Buffet, this was nowhere near the case. When a young person turns 18, there is a lot pushed upon them: college, joining the workforce, the pressure to figure out their life paths. Amidst the common fears of change, the understanding how to participate in a society and democracy our citizens are part of should not be included in the changes endured.

Voter education and engagement is critical to the country we live in and as the Founding Fathers firmly stood behind, the maintenance of democracy stands on the shoulders of participation through civic education.