



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Bill Bridgeo in support of*

## **LD 1356, An Act to Improve the Local Referendum Process by Increasing the Percentage of the Population Required to Submit a Local Referendum Question**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good afternoon Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Bill Bridgeo and I represent House District #60, the east side of Augusta. I am here today to testify in support of **LD 1356, An Act to Improve the Local Referendum Process by Increasing the Percentage of the Population Required to Submit a Local Referendum Question.**

I suspect that Representative Graham was surprised when I quite enthusiastically agreed to cosponsor her bill. That enthusiasm stems from my observation over the years of the abuse of the initiative and referendum process.

In my years as the city manager of Calais in the early 1980s, and then in my early years as city manager of Augusta in the late 1990s, those communities had to contend with a small but determined group of people who were seemingly committed to blocking just about everything the elected officials tried to do. They routinely stalled the apparatus of local government and cost the communities' unnecessary legal, administrative and lost opportunity costs by taking advantage of the low thresholds in the municipal charters at that time to force policy decisions to referendum.

They usually failed, but it was a frustrating and counter-productive way to conduct the people's business.

In the early 2000s, through a charter revision process, the voters of Augusta tightened up the city's referendum and initiative process by requiring a minimum of 20% of those having voted in the last gubernatorial election to sign any petition challenging actions approved by the city council in order for a referendum to be required.

The mayors and councilors of Augusta have a long history of respecting the wishes of their constituents and there are still occasional referendum questions put to the voters on key issues,

but the day-to-day business of city government proceeds much more smoothly and far less contentiously.

At all levels, we Americans value our representative forms of government. We look to our elected officials to do the hard work of studying pressing policy issues in depth and making informed decisions accordingly. The Reform Movement of the early 1900s advanced the instruments of initiative and referendum and they have an important place in our modern system of government but they can be, and often are, misused. LD 1356, if passed, will help prevent such misuse.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.