

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 175 – Ought Not To Pass

**RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to  
Ensure That Only Citizens of the United States May Participate in  
Elections**

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
VETERANS AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

February 3, 2025

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, good afternoon. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Director at the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I urge you to reject LD 175.

The ACLU of Maine is committed to protecting and expanding both voting rights and immigrants' rights. We firmly believe that our democracy is stronger when as many people as possible have a voice. That is why we have urged you in session after session to consider ways to expand and strengthen, rather than constrict and exclude, participation in our voting process.

Although voting in Maine has always been restricted to citizens, this has not always been true across the country. Between 1776 and 1926, 40 states and federal territories allowed non-citizens to vote in elections and hold public offices.<sup>1</sup> It was only when fear and xenophobia took hold, marked by even the Washington Post commenting on the increasing deterioration in the quality of immigrants, that states began to restrict voting to citizens only.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Olivia B. Waxman, *Non-Citizens Used to Be Able to Vote in U.S. Elections. Here's What Changed*, Time (Jul. 18, 2017), available at <http://time.com/4859478/immigrant-voters-history/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Everyone who pays taxes, lives in community, and sends their children to local schools should have a voice in how their community is governed. Given that Maine schools are currently struggling to meet the needs of their students and communities, more community involvement in how schools are run is going to help make our schools more responsive and successful. Moreover, all taxpayers should help decide how tax dollars are spent. The principle that taxation should entail representation was a key reason the American colonies declared independence in 1776.

Finally, if towns and cities in Maine wish to amend their charters to give their residents a voice in municipal elections, the legislature should not create a Constitutional barrier. The committee should not give in to the urge to stigmatize and de-value non-citizens, and should instead turn its attention to proactive legislation that expands rights and freedoms. We are proud that Maine is a leader on voting rights, and urge this committee to protect that tradition.

Please reject this harmful bill.