



Craig V. Hickman  
Senator, District 14

THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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Augusta, Maine 04333

*Testimony of Senator Craig V. Hickman introducing*  
**LD 132, Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Constitution of Maine**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*  
Thursday, March 6, 9:30am

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Craig Hickman and I am proud to represent Senate District 14, twelve municipalities in southern Kennebec County including my beloved hometown of Winthrop. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce LD 132, "Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study the Constitution of Maine," to the Committee today.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in a 1789 letter to James Madison, "Every constitution then, & every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years. If it be enforced longer, it is an act of force, & not of right."

It is past time, then, that we take a deep, hard look at our state's Constitution. This foundational document has been amended by the People 177 times in 206 years, but it has been 62 years since it was studied by the Legislature in an attempt to understand what is working, what isn't working, and what could work better. This overdue review is about bringing our institutions in line with modern needs, modern realities, and the desires of a modern populace.

This resolution, if passed, will create the Commission to Study the Constitution of Maine to study and review our Constitution in one place. The commission will submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary by November 4, 2026, after which the Judiciary Committee may submit legislation, including any resolutions to amend the Constitution of Maine, based on the findings and recommendations in the report, to the 133rd Legislature in 2027.

The resolve proposes various changes for study by the Commission, many of which we have heard about from constituents, in the media, and even in other bills before the Legislature this session. These include:

1. Strengthening Maine's Declaration of Rights, Article I of the Constitution of Maine;
2. Removing procedural minutiae from the Constitution of Maine that are better left to statute;
3. Enabling the popular election of constitutional officers;
4. Establishing 4-year terms for Senators;
5. Reducing the number of members of the Legislature;
6. Establishing a unicameral Legislature;
7. Allowing constitutional amendments to be initiated directly by the people of the State; and
8. Examining any constitutional resolutions introduced in the 132nd Legislature.

I also propose that the Committee consider adding two additional members to the Commission created in this resolve: a representative from an association representing the municipal perspective and a member of the executive branch or the Governor's designee.

I presented the same resolve last session, and it was passed by the Senate but did not make it through the House. And so we try again to ensure our Constitution works as well as possible for the people of Maine today.

Douglass Rooks, a Maine political commentator and a constituent of mine at the time, wrote this when I introduced this Resolve last session:

"But my favorite part is this one: 'Removing procedural minutiae from the constitution that are better left to statute.' It's really, really hard to amend the federal Constitution, but Maine's is amended all the time, mostly to adjust the "minutiae" that shouldn't be there. A recent example: Town clerks, overwhelmed by nominating petitions, wanted more time to check them than provided by the deadlines unwisely placed in the Constitution. The amendment passed the Legislature, but was narrowly rejected by the voters. The clerks are still frazzled."

This resolve gives the Commission, and by extension the Legislature, a chance to examine what other "procedural minutiae" might not need to be in the Constitution, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our state government.

Rooks further said that this resolve "represents something quite important: a desire by younger Mainers to shake up state government, to see if it can't be restructured to better reflect people's needs in a new century. ... It's an opportunity to match this riding tide [of Maine's growing population and economy] with government reforms that could make Maine more prosperous, and a better place to live. And it starts with finding, and implementing, the best ideas."

Jim Fossel, another Maine political columnist who is also a constituent, praised some of the ideas in this resolve last session.

"While proposals like this are rarely enacted as is, many of them haven't been given the consideration they deserve, instead being enacted without sufficient examination of their potential unintended consequences. ... [The senior property tax freeze passed in 2022 is] an example of a program that, while well-intended, was not perhaps as well thought-out as it could have been, and now lawmakers are scrambling to fix it. So, it's worth taking a moment to thoroughly review any changes to the state constitution going forward."

Fossel writes specifically in support of the proposal to consolidate Maine's bicameral legislature into a unicameral system. He argues, "Often, having two chambers – particularly when they're both elected every two years – serves to obfuscate the legislative process rather than enhance it. ... [H]aving two chambers often simply slows the legislative process unnecessarily without adding anything to the debate. Even with uncontroversial bills, the Legislature has to take the time to have legislation printed, read, placed on the calendar and voted on in each chamber."

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to introduce this bill.

Craig V. Hickman  
State Senator, District 14