



YOUTHWORK MAKES THE BOOTHWORK

"Use your voice. Use your vote."

March 11, 2025

Senator Rafferty
Representative Murphy
Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Emanuel Pariser and I am testifying in favor of LD 734, *An Act to Promote Voter Registration in Maine's High Schools*. I have taught and led high schools in Maine since 1973 at The Community School in Camden for 36 years, and then at the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences in Hinckley Maine for 13 years; both schools that I helped to start. I am coming to you as a lifelong secondary teacher and administrator, and also a founder of Youthwork Makes the Boothwork, a student driven effort to inspire students to support town election officials with the work of running elections, as well as building a more active and engaged young electorate.

LD 734 is a bill that clearly supports one of the fundamental purposes of our entire educational enterprise – to create an educated and engaged citizenry. If every high school in Maine ran annual voter registration drives many more students would be ready to vote when they turned 18. Research shows that if young people vote the first time they have the opportunity they will be more likely to be dependable voters throughout their life-time, and conversely, if they don't vote, they are more likely to be undependable voters.

In times that appear to be so polarized, we need as many people engaged in the fundamental act that separates democracies from dictatorships: the act of voting. LD 734 simply requires schools to provide or reach out to a third party to conduct an annual registration drive so that as many students as would wish to can get registered to vote. In Maine pre-registration can begin at 16 years old. All pre-registered students are eligible to work as election workers if they choose to as well.

LD 734 encourages active engagement of young people and educational institutions in a fundamental freedom that we cherish in the United States. Active civic engagement builds strong democratic communities where every one has a voice and deserves to be heard, and we all work together for the benefit of all. Vibrant communities build a Maine that supports and engages everyone. A strong Maine makes our United States a stronger more resilient and compassionate country.

Every year Schools in Maine are required to hold regular fire drills. This takes time, planning and resources. It's a matter of safety. Voter registration drives are a fire drill to maintain our democracy. We need to plan and execute them regularly in every secondary school so that we can maintain our form of government. Young people are our future, they need to learn that we need their civic engagement. Regular voter registration drives will make that point every year. Let's make this a priority here in Maine.

Sincerely,
Emanuel Pariser

Founder, Youthwork Makes the Boothwork

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