

GEORGE C SCHELLING
443 LEACH'S POINT
ORLAND, ME 04472

March 11, 2025

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Chair
Representative Kelly Murphy, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural
Affairs
Re: Support for LD 734, An Act to Promote Voter Registration for
Students in Maine High Schools

Esteemed Legislators:

My name is George Schelling. I am a retired attorney from Orland in Hancock County

In 2023, I was concerned that young people were not voting, but I found a Harvard study that demonstrated that when young people are actually registered they vote as often as other demographic groups. But a current study shows that only 36% of 18 year olds in Maine are registered to vote.

So I volunteered with the Maine League of Women Voters to foster student registration in all six high schools in Hancock County, which has the highest registration rate in Maine. I worked from the summer of 2023 through November 2024. I phoned, emailed, zoomed, and held meetings with administrators, teachers and students. I helped set up and personally participated in registration drives. Nonetheless, I estimate that last fall, fewer than half of the County's high school students were exposed to a supported registration drive despite the fact that that election was the most controversial and consequential election in my nearly 80 years. Even more troubling, students from poorer towns were disproportionately given fewer opportunities to register than

students from richer towns. This difference between wealthier and poorer areas is reflected in county data across the State.

In one school, the fear of backlash to any political activity, which unfortunately included voting, played a role in the school going two years with no voter registration drive. But after reviewing this bill, an administrator told me he liked the concept and that a state law requiring registration drives would provide cover, making it much easier for the school to hold a drive. He said that although schools sometimes resist mandates from Augusta, he would welcome the law since it would advance an important educational goal and could be accomplished with minimal effort or interference with school programs.

At a different school, the administration enthusiastically supported a registration drive. An administrator told me she found it “incredibly easy” to do, requiring only a couple of hours of work. The students responded enthusiastically.

In another school, a student initiated drive received minimal administration support and registered only one student. The principal had approved the drive but knew little about how it was conducted or its results.

At another school, there was no response to our many offers of assistance and no drive was held.

Local control, as cited by the MPA in its opposition to this bill, has resulted, even in Hancock County, NOT in schools doing it their own way, but instead too often doing nothing at all, even when offered the personnel and resources to do it. That hurts all students and disproportionately impacts the opportunity of poorer kids to vote and shape their future.