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March 11, 2025

Testimony of Rep. Julie McCabe introducing
**LD 734, An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in
Maine's High Schools**
Before the Joint Standing Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Good afternoon, Chairs Rafferty and Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Julie McCabe and I represent District 93, which is a part of Lewiston.

I am humbled to testify today in support of **LD 734, An Act to Promote Voter Registration for Students in Maine's High Schools.**

Over the past 12 years, I have had the privilege of teaching in Maine's public schools. As an educator, I have always believed in the fundamental importance of empowering students to be active and engaged members of their community. I believe that the civic mission of schools is paramount to all others.

Central to that mission is the responsibility to educate students to become participants in our formal democratic processes, not least of which is understanding the right to vote. As it stands today, we are failing Maine students by not inviting them to participate in the most foundational element of our democracy, the voting process.

The legislation before you would require every high school to conduct annual voter registration activities. This voter registration drive could take place in the lunchroom, advisory period or during a Social Studies class (the ideal setting).

Because our high schools are not required to offer voter registration drives, as it stands today, approximately **one in three 18 year olds in Maine are registered to vote.** Data within The Civics Center's testimony will provide a county by county breakdown as well as state comparisons, revealing that Maine trails national leaders.

For more context, current Maine law allows schools to offer voter registration drives. Students as young as 16 can pre-register to vote. And all high schools are sent green voter registration cards each year by the Secretary of State's office. However, because there is no requirement that

schools actually host voter registration drives, many registration cards never make it out of the box in the main office.

Opponents might say that teachers and principals are overtaxed already and I couldn't agree more. However, if you can host a pep rally, you can host a voter registration drive.

Opponents might believe this to be partisan but there is nothing partisan here. All students no matter their political leanings should be invited to participate in our democratic process.

For those concerned about the political backlash of hosting a voter registration in this strident political climate, I empathize with you. But, we can't take the easy way out and shirk responsibility to our students, to the next generation of leaders, because we are afraid of teaching them how to register to vote.

While this bill is by no means the panacea, it does seek to restore the balance and hold schools accountable for their civic charge.

I will close by saying that, I guarantee you that every graduating senior is asked by a teacher, at least once, what their plans are after high school. What I cannot guarantee is whether that student was asked to register to vote. We provide space in school for students to fill out college applications or to take CNA exams in preparation for their future, but what we aren't doing in every school is asking students to register to vote.

This signals a failure of priorities to me, where we are placing academic and economic goals above the core civic mission of school—to create engaged community members.

For most students, our democracy is a black box. They do not well understand its workings or governing principles. But more disheartening, students do not understand their role in our democracy—they do not feel that they belong.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 734 and signal to students that they do belong, and they do have a place in Maine's democracy.

I thank you for your time and would gladly answer any questions.