



TO: The Honorable Joseph Baldacci
The Honorable Suzanne Salisbury, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: April 14, 2025

RE: LD 1517 - An Act to Replace Participation Thresholds with Approval Thresholds in
Certain School, Municipal and County Measures

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government.

My name is Debra McDonough. I am a resident of Scarborough, here to testify on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine. We support LD 1517 and want to thank Representative Sato for working with us to address this issue.

The League of Women Voters of Maine is a nonpartisan political organization that has been working since 1920 to encourage informed and active participation in government, to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and to influence public policy through education and advocacy. We never support nor oppose any political party or candidate.

And we only support a particular policy after an extensive process of study, member education and consensus. We support this bill, which replaces participation thresholds with approval thresholds, because it aligns with our position statement on Voter Representation and Electoral Systems, which reads in part “the League supports electoral methods that. . . promote sincere voting over strategic voting.”

A participation threshold specifies the number of persons who must participate in the vote on a particular ballot measure in order for the vote to count. As you heard in the sponsor’s testimony, participation thresholds, as currently implemented across Maine statute, promote strategic voting, particularly on the part of those opposed to a measure. Opponents of the measure have two pathways for defeating it and need to guess whether they should rally their supporters to vote in opposition, or instead boycott the election in an effort to invalidate the vote. This is the very definition of strategic voting. Separately, any voting method that provides

a disincentive to vote is antithetical to the League's values in encouraging citizen participation in elections.

An approval threshold specifies instead the number of persons who must approve of a particular measure in order for the vote to count, and approval thresholds, as proposed in LD 1517, promote sincere voting. Each person has an incentive to vote their conscience, either in support of or in opposition to the measure at hand. The measure can only pass if it has sufficient support, both as determined by the approval threshold, expressed as a percentage of votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election, and also relative to the opposition, as described in the relevant statute. And the measure can only fail if enough people vote against it.

This bill does not presume to second guess the Legislature's determination of what level of support is required to pass a particular measure. In each section of the bill, the approval threshold was designed to match the floor of support required by the existing participation threshold. The committee is encouraged to check our work. The required strength of the vote also remains unchanged. Most of these measures require a majority vote, although Deorganization by a Municipality, as described in Title 30-A, §7209, requires a vote of 2/3s.

In summary, the League of Women voters supports approval thresholds, which promote sincere voting, over participation thresholds, which promote strategic voting. I encourage each of you to join us in supporting LD 1517, and would be happy to address any questions you might have.

An example:

Imagine a measure to amend a municipal charter in a municipality where 1000 people voted in the last gubernatorial election.

Under current statute, 30% of 1000, or 300, voters would need to participate for the vote on the charter amendment to count.

Charter amendments require a majority vote, so if exactly 300 voters participate, the measure would only pass if 151 of those votes are in support of the amendment.

An equivalent approval threshold should also require 151 votes in support of the charter amendment, which is one more than 15% of 1000 votes cast in the last gubernatorial election.

This is why the recommended approval threshold would require that “the total number of votes cast for the question exceeds 15% of the total votes cast in the municipality at the last gubernatorial election.”

Topics of each statute addressed in LD 1517.

Title 20-A, §1466: Withdrawal of a single municipality from a regional school unit

Title 20-A, §1704: Sharing costs (Community School District, sharing costs)

Title 20-A, §15693: School budget; budget formats (education - essential services and programs)

Title 30-A, §125: Economic and community development (County bonds)

Title 30-A, §2105: Submission to voters (Charter revision or adoption)

Title 30-A, §2526: Choice and qualifications of town officials (Changing the number of assessors)

Title 30-A, §5102: Creation of authority (Urban renewal authority)

Title 30-A, §5404: Issuance of revenue bonds (Municipal bonds issued by towns)

Title 30-A, §7209: Final approval by the voters (Deorganization of a municipality)

Title 35-A, §3903: Formation of single-member district (Electric power district)

Title 35-A, §3904: Formation of multimember district (Electric power district)

Title 38, §1101: Formation (Sanitary district)

Title 38, §2002: Formation (Coastal and lakeshed water districts)