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April 14, 2024

Testimony of Representative Ellie Sato presenting

LD 1517, An Act to Replace Participation Thresholds with Approval Thresholds in Certain School, Municipal and County Measures *Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. I'm Ellie Sato and I represent House District 109, which includes part of Gorham. I'm here to present **LD 1517, An Act to Replace Participation Thresholds with Approval Thresholds in Certain School, Municipal and County Measures**.

This bill would change the requirements for validity of proposed measures in certain school, municipal or county votes. It moves to an approval threshold, rather than a participation threshold. Specifically, it would retain the requirement for a certain level of support but, instead of measuring the required vote percentage based on both votes in opposition and in favor, this measure would adjust the requirement for participation to be measured by the number of votes in favor of a particular measure.

This change encourages sincere voting over strategic voting. It does so by no longer asking voters to consider if they need to abstain from a vote in order to defeat a measure. Since, by voting in opposition, they could help a measure meet the validity threshold when otherwise it would have been void, even with majority support, should it not meet the participation threshold - rather than simply voting in opposition to defeat a measure. This bill would make voting in opposition to defeat a measure, which is more intuitive for voters, reality.

While LD 1517 does cut the percentages in half, it does not reduce the required level of support because the percentage applies only to the votes in support of the measure. I would like to illustrate this concept with a hypothetical.

Let's 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 in order for the outcome of that measure to be valid.

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

This bill would establish an equivalent approval threshold. 15% of 1000 votes cast in the last gubernatorial election is 150, so the vote would be valid with a minimum of 151 votes in support.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.