



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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To the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, I offer my thanks for taking the time to allow me to support LD 1437, *RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Specify the Qualifications of Electors in State and Local Elections*. My name is Donny Ardell, and I represent House District 6.

Why limit civil engagement to U.S. citizens? I have professional experience with U.S. Immigration law, married into a family of immigrants, and my family and I lived in other countries as part of my work; as a result, I understand the issue, personally, from several sides. In my residence in those countries, I never expected to be able to be involved in civil life there, in the same way my wife's family, until they became proudly naturalized citizens of the U.S., had *any* expectation to be involved in civil life here. They understood that, until they became fully committed to American life through citizenship, they were subject to the laws created by those who were, in the same way I never expected to have a political voice as an American in Saudi Arabia or Yemen, and accepted that I was subject to the laws of their society.

Foreign nationals residing in Maine can choose to fully engage in civil life here by fully crossing the threshold and becoming U.S. citizens. The path to U.S. citizenship for foreign nationals with sufficient visa status and residency time involves an interview to verify eligibility, and a brief test of English language proficiency and basic American history and civics. These communication and knowledge requirements, though rudimentary, are important for the foreign-born voter to show their knowledge and understanding of what our government structure is, how the three branches interact, and what their civil rights are.

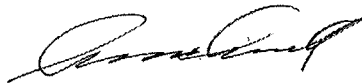
And if the argument is made that the naturalization process is too difficult or expensive, programs exist with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to reduce or defray some or all of the application fee for large and low-income family groups, and policy to waive the language requirement for seniors exists. Clearly, U.S citizenship is attainable.

Additionally, creating a citizenship requirement for voting simplifies balloting and ballot distribution, creating a system less prone to error, confusion, or expensive and time-consuming ballot recounts.

In closing, while I firmly believe in the extension of the U.S. Bill of Rights, and the Maine Declaration of Rights, to all persons present, civic engagement in the voting booth is different, in that it expects both a citizenship and committed residency requirement. As a result, I ask you, as members of this important committee, to act as wise and faithful gatekeepers of civil life in Maine, to trust Maine voters to have a voice and decide if they want committed, U.S. citizen electors to determine matters important to them in their communities at the county, municipal, and local level.

The question at this stage is this: "Do the members of Veterans and Legal Affairs committee favor allowing Mainers to decide who is eligible to vote in their elections?" It is my hope the committee can see the wisdom of placing that trust in Mainers. Thank you.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Donald J. Ardell', written in a cursive style.

Donald J. Ardell
State Representative