

Willa Morales
South Portland
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Testimony in Support of LD 1051:

An Act to Promote Civic Engagement and Voter Participation for Young People by Lowering the Voting Age for Municipal Elections to 16 Years of Age

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Willa Morales, I am 14 years old and live in South Portland, and I am here to testify in support of LD 1051, An Act To Promote Civic Engagement and Voter Participation for Young People by Lowering the Voting Age for Municipal Elections to 16 Years of Age. I am supporting this bill because I believe that young people are the future. We are the next generation. And we deserve to be a part of our communities. This bill will allow people 16 and 17 years of age to vote in municipal elections.

This bill includes voting for the school board, which I think is so important. It is students that are directly impacted by the decisions of the school board and being able to vote for the people who represent us is crucial. Our opinions do matter, and by lowering the voting age in local elections the candidates would have come to us to win over our vote, it would encourage people who are running to have students and young people's best interest in mind.

At 16 we can get our driver license, we can be prosecuted in court, and we engage in intellectual exercises such as the SAT that, for many, decide the course of the rest of their life.

I want the people who make decisions about my school and my community to have my best interest in mind, I want them to be thinking about how we can make school a better place. I want to have the opportunity to get involved and learn more about the election process. This bill will give young people the opportunity to engage in our communities. Young people are a part of the community and are actually spending the most time in their community, utilizing the resources, such as parks, sidewalks, bike lanes and sports fields. We will learn the importance of local elections, and how change starts local. We will also get the chance to be involved with bills on housing, climate, and public spaces. The only voices at the table are older people, who are not actually receiving the services, those who are receiving them should have a say in what they are and how they are received. I want to be a part of the decision making process and I want to have confidence in the people who run my community.

This bill will ensure that when these municipal elections are happening, that the best interest of young people will be at the forefront of everyone's minds. Our perspectives and opinions are important, and it will only broaden our collective outlook.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I hope that you pass this important legislation.