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Testimony of Rep. Victoria Morales presenting

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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Victoria Morales. I represent South Portland in House District 33, and I am extremely proud to present **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**.

Young people are 20% of our population and 100% of our future, yet they have very little opportunity to have their voices heard in their communities. This bill changes that by starting at the local level, where democracy has the most potential to impact everyday lives.

Think about the most important stakeholders for every school board member. Undoubtedly, it is our students. We invest in their education, making sure they have the most opportunity to learn and grow so they can achieve their personal and professional dreams. By allowing students 16 and over to vote, the age at which one can work and drive, we are providing young people with the opportunity to use their voice to guide the policies that will directly serve them.

Think also about who spends the most time in our communities, playing in our parks, walking on the sidewalks, riding bikes through our neighborhoods, participating in sports and other community activities, and volunteering to help their neighbors. Our students. And their opinions on all things local, like policies that impact our climate, our built environment, our local transportation system, our after school activities, homelessness, equity, racial justice, and public health are very important. These are issues young people are thinking about and want to weigh in on, and it would serve our communities better to allow them to do that.

Additionally, we all know that purely local elections have poor voter turnout compared to elections for the President or Governor. We can change that by creating a local voting habit, which we all know is needed for folks to make voting a priority. When someone understands the importance of voting early on, and they know that their voice matters, they are more likely to continue to vote and continue to participate in their local democracy. Allowing young people 16+ to vote will help students learn the importance of local governance and how each individual can make important changes in their communities, whether that be to create a park, or celebrate a tradition, or advocate for bike lanes or a public health advocate for seniors.

The strength of our democracy depends on the diversity of voices at the table. It is time to bring our students formally into this process.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this important policy to you.