



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Melanie Sachs, co-sponsor 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” before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Melanie Sachs, and I am honored to represent House District 48, which includes Freeport and part of Pownal. While I am unable to be present this testimony in person, I am delighted as a co-sponsor and strong supporter of LD 1051 to submit this testimony in writing for your consideration.

LD 1051 seeks to lower the voting age for municipal elections to 16 years of age. I have engaged students of all ages throughout my roles in public service- as an elected official, a candidate, a nonprofit director, and a community leader. I held two youth forums in the last year, which included several high school students with leadership roles on the Maine Climate Council, with Equality Maine programs, and within their own school communities. One of these forums was facilitated almost entirely by a soon-to-be sixteen-year-old student. I was also grateful to be part of the recent conversation between Legislators and members of the Young People’s Caucus, hearing the direct impact that Covid-19 has had on their lives. Like many communities, our local RSU school board has several student representatives serving as valued members for years, who sift through the same issues, budgets, and policies as the other members.

As both a Girl Scout and Boy Scout Leader for eight years, I constantly discussed the importance of public service and community with hundreds of students in those programs. This bill provides a tangible way to do so at a pivotal time in an adolescent’s development (I am also a licensed clinical social worker, so feel I am on strong clinical ground making that point. I am happy to talk further about development stages if you wish!)

I have been incredibly impressed by the engagement, thoughtfulness, and passion that teenagers in Maine demonstrate about the issues in the world around them. While I have tried hard to engage in outreach with these population, LD 1051 provides another way for our residents to have a voice in issues closest to their community. Early civic engagement is paramount to reinforcing a sense of community and involvement. While I note the concerns raised by the Maine Town and Clerks’ Association, I am heartened by the Secretary of State’s belief that there is a path forward for this initiative. I urge you to unanimously recommend passage of LD 1051.