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Testimony of Representative Victoria Doudera on LD 1522, “An Act To Update and Eliminate References in Statute to Aldermen, Selectmen and Overseers of the Poor”

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Greetings Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I am Vicki Doudera, and I represent House District 94, the towns of Camden, Islesboro and Rockport. I’m here today to introduce LD 1522, “An Act To Update and Eliminate References in Statute to Aldermen, Selectmen and Overseers of the Poor.”

Massachusetts has given Maine some “wicked awesome” things. The chocolate chip cookie, invented by Ruth Graves Wakefield in 1938. Basketball — first played in Springfield, Mass, in 1891. The microwave oven. Rubber tires--- and Donna Summer. And my personal favorite ---- Marshmallow Fluff.

Massachusetts also gave us many of our laws.

For almost two centuries, portions of Maine were governed by the acts and resolves of the Massachusetts General Court, and many of these laws remain in effect in Maine today.

LD 1522 seeks to modernize some of this archaic language in our state statutes to reflect the reality as it exists today in Maine. It will update and eliminate references in statute to “Overseers of the Poor,” as well as “Aldermen” and “Selectmen.” The term “selectmen” was first used in 1635 -- and today, despite the numbers of Maine women who are active in every level of government, the term still remains on the books.

For example, the county I live in, Knox County, has more than two dozen elected female municipal officials, at least six of which have been chosen by their peers to lead their respective Select Boards as chairs and vice chairs. A group of these civic-minded women have submitted testimony together in support of LD 1522. Joining them is a Lincolnville Select Board member who led the charge in his town to informally adopt the gender neutral term “Select Board.”

Indeed, many towns in our state have already implemented the practice of using the “Select Board” reference instead of the old statutory terms. Other towns have discussed doing so but have held off, unsure of the legality given Maine state law. In 2019, the town of Topsham discussed changing “Board of Selectmen” to “Select Board,” but did not, citing these very concerns. This bill will add much needed clarity for municipalities across our state.

Lastly, the reference to “Overseers of the Poor” ought to be eliminated. This 17th century terminology is outdated, and today’s Select Board members already administer general assistance funds for those in financial need without a term reminiscent of Charles Dickens’ days.

Please take this opportunity to modernize Maine state law to reflect the reality of today’s world by passing LD 1522.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.