



Testimony in Support of LD 1536
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and members of the Committee,

My name is Eamonn Dundon, and I am the Director of Advocacy at the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. I am here today to express our organization's strong support for LD 1536 to reform and improve the transparency of municipal citizen-initiated referendum.

As alluded to in Representative Bradstreet's testimony, there has recently been a raft of citizen's referendums that accentuate the need for reasonable reforms to this process to ensure that citizens are fully informed of what they are voting on, including any operational or fiscal impacts and implementation challenges a municipality could face from the adoption of a particular ordinance.

Currently, public hearings are held after a measure has gained the necessary signatures to get on the ballot, but testimony in that hearing is often limited to arguments around the validity of whether or not the petition has met the necessary bar to make the ballot. At least in Portland, testimony speaking to the substance of the referendum is not entertained, depriving citizens of a public venue to articulate arguments for or against a proposed ordinance change that are written behind closed doors by special interest groups.

We would also like to suggest the inclusion of two additional amendments to the municipal referendum process:

1. *The municipal clerk shall review the proposed ordinance and summary submitted by the petitioners and shall draft the final summary and title for the petition. Said summary and title shall clearly and objectively describe the content of the proposal and shall be written in words with common and everyday meaning. The summary and title shall not contain language designed to promote or oppose the proposal. In the event sufficient signatures are obtained to submit the ordinance to the voters, the summary and title included on the petition shall accompany the text of the ordinance on the ballot.*
2. *The municipal clerk shall request and obtain from the municipal treasurer a fiscal impact statement describing the fiscal impact of the proposed ordinance on the municipal budget. Said fiscal impact statement shall be printed on the petition form and the ballot.*

These two additional amendments would further aid in citizen's understanding of the matters before them. Currently there are no requirements for how the questions and summaries are drafted for the petition and ballot, leading to situations where interest groups can write their own preferred language, distorting ballot questions to suit their political goals. Additionally, without the requirement for fiscal impact statements voters are completely disconnected from the very real impacts referendum questions can have on municipal budgets, and thus the property tax burden.

Taken together, our support for the underlying bill and the proposed additions would make the municipal process more closely resemble the state process for citizen-initiated referendums. This creates consistency for Mainers who deserve to know what they are voting on and what the impact of that vote will be.



For these reasons we ask that you support these commonsense changes to support good governance principles for participatory democracy. Thank you for your time today, and, on behalf of the Portland Regional Chamber I ask that you please support LD 1536.