

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

I'm here today to support LD 1126, an Act to Create an Online Voter Registration System. As the coordinator of Bates College's registration effort, I am deeply familiar with the logistical challenges presented by the paper registration system, and the barriers it created for young people across Maine.

I was responsible for registering Bates students to vote this fall. Under normal circumstances we could hold in-person registration drives, allowing us to mitigate any mistakes on the physical cards. This year the pandemic made in-person registration impossible. As a result, we had to individually contact and track down students who erred on their registration cards. Often, we could not get in touch with a student and were not able to help them access the ballot box. Paper registration thus became a blockage to accessing the vote, an unfortunate and upsetting outcome for young people.

Additionally, Bates students are sometimes prone to make mistakes and have illegible handwriting. This presents an additional burden to the Clerk and her staff as they try to interpret student handwriting correctly. If there is a mistake, it can cause confusion and anxiety when a student goes to vote on election day and their name has been spelled incorrectly.

Furthermore, keeping track of hundreds of paper registration cards and delivering them to City Hall safely presented a Covid risk to everyone involved. The alternative (mailing cards to City Hall) presented a barrier to students without easy access to postage. Online Registration is more inclusive of young people by eliminating the need for postage, as well as immunocompromised people, people with disabilities, and generally those who have difficulty leaving the house.

OVR is one of the most effective steps we can take towards folding young people into the democratic process. Students are highly tech-savvy, and with some guidance will easily understand how to fill out an online voter registration form. They will want to engage in the electoral process if it feels comfortable, familiar, and easy to them. Online forms will be standardized and will not present handwriting challenges to the Clerk.

All of these factors combined mean that OVR will directly enfranchise more people in the state of Maine, an undeniably positive outcome.

Paper registration is unnecessarily logistically complicated, and a barrier to the vote for many. In the interest of equity and greater enfranchisement, please vote yes on LD 1126. Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any of your questions.

Sincerely,
Amalia Herren-Lage
Bates Votes Co-Coordinator
Bates College '22