

Terry Baker
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LD 1446

I am a retired educator who has lived in Maine for almost 20 years. During my career, I worked with young people in a variety of settings, both in and out of the classroom. What I see is a need for young people to engage in the civic processes of our democracy on multiple levels, and I think that young people are rising to that challenge in increasing numbers.

I have studied human development, and the research shows that 16-year-olds are just as mature as 18-year-olds. The regions of the brain that guide rational, deliberative decisions is fully developed by age 16. What 16-year-olds may lack is experience. Being legally permitted to engage in the voting process would help to provide that experience and allow these young people to put their cognitive skills to work in a meaningful, civic fashion.

Most 16-year-olds live in a stable, supportive family environment. While they do have opinions of their own, that may vary greatly from those of their parents, they find it possible to have in-depth discussions in the safety of their homes and are more than capable of the complex reasoning needed to understand contemporary issues.

Allowing 16-year-olds to participate in the democratic franchise would allow them to develop civic habits well before their departure into their adult lives. Extending voting rights to these young people in state and local elections would give them a personal, up-close connection to perhaps the most important aspect of citizenship in a democracy.

I strongly urge you to support LD 1446, extending the right to vote in state and local elections for 16-year-olds. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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