

Hello chairman, members of the committee, and fellow citizens,

My name is Carter Bennett, and I am a 15-year-old from Wayne. Unfortunately, I couldn't make it in person today, but I am here today to testify in support of LD 1446.

Lowering the voting age isn't a radical idea. In fact, it would reflect the many adult responsibilities 16- and 17-year-olds take on. In Maine, they can drive, work, pay taxes, and even get married or be tried as an adult in court. 16- and 17-year-olds are already valuable community members, but they are still denied the most basic right of representation: voting.

One issue that is close to home for me is representation in education. Students like me can attend school board meetings, but don't have any choice in who sits on those boards, despite the members making significant decisions that will impact us for the rest of our lives.

Secondly, I want to address the connection between voting at a young age and civic engagement. Research from Tufts University shows that people who begin voting earlier are more likely to continue to vote long-term. Lowering the voting age would help communities. As researchers say, it would make them more "prosperous and resilient". Young voters bring new ideas and fresh perspectives that might not have otherwise been considered. Lowering the voting age has time and again proved that it increases civic and community engagement, also increasing long-term voter turnout.

The idea of lowering the voting age has been tested and proven. Cities such as Takoma Park, Maryland, and Berkeley, California, have successfully lowered the voting age in local elections. Many countries also have lower voting ages than 18. Around the world, countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Austria have lowered the voting age to 16 in all elections. There are also some countries, such as Germany, where many states have legalized 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. And the positive impacts have been clear. In Austria, voter turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds surpassed that of 18 to 20-year-olds, and has stayed that way. A University of Edinburgh study found similar results. Scots who started voting at age 16 always vote at higher rates than those who began at age 18. And in Latin America, young people who began voting earlier have expressed more confidence in their democracy.

The evidence is clear. Lowering the voting age would empower young people, build a stronger civic foundation for Maine, and increase voter turnout.

I urge you to support LD 1446 and support a stronger future for Maine's democracy.

Thank you for your time.