



Testimony in Support of LD 175 & 1437:

“RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Ensure That Only Citizens of the United States May Participate in Elections” & “RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Specify the Qualifications of Electors in State and Local Elections”

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of LDs 175 and 1437.

The foundation of any democracy rests on the principle that its elections are conducted by and for those legally bound to its laws and institutions. The right to vote is not only a mechanism of self-expression but a responsibility that should be exclusively reserved for United States citizens. These bills reaffirm this principle and clarify our state Constitution to ensure that the integrity of Maine’s elections remains intact at all levels of government.

Reinforcing the Connection Between Citizenship and Voting

Voting is the cornerstone of self-governance, and the right to vote is among the most sacred rights granted by citizenship. By limiting voting rights to U.S. citizens only, these LDs reinforce the importance of citizenship as a shared bond that ties individuals to the responsibilities of our democratic system. Opening elections to non-citizens undermines this bond and diminishes the value of citizenship, a principle that should remain central to Maine’s democratic process.

Protecting Election Integrity and Public Confidence

Including non-citizens in elections creates unnecessary confusion and undermines public confidence in the electoral system. Voting rights for non-citizens blur the lines of accountability and loyalty to the state and nation. A recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that over 40% of voters were not confident that those who are ineligible to vote would be stopped from doing so.¹ Regardless of one’s feelings on the validity of those beliefs, we must fight the growing distrust in the democratic process in our country, and this bill is a great way to do that.

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/10/24/confidence-in-voting-access-and-integrity-expectations-for-whether-and-when-the-election-results-will-be-clear/>



Even Maine's Secretary of State Shenna Bellows has said that accusations of noncitizen voting that, in her view, are unsubstantiated still decrease public trust in our elections and even lay the groundwork to challenge future election results.² Secretary Bellows is absolutely right; therefore, it is in Maine's best interest to cut off these claims before they even begin, and this is the best way to do it.

Localities are potentially undermining the citizenship requirement of voting.

Some localities, such as Portland, have been undermining the public trust in elections by considering allowing noncitizens to vote in local elections.³ The risk this poses is confusing a population that disproportionately knows English only as a second language and may be unaware of federal or state voting requirements. The Migration Policy Institute found that 56.4% of noncitizens in the United States spoke English less than "very well."⁴

Additionally, while Maine state law (21-A M.R.S.A. §111.1) currently disallows citizen voting, there is still some question as to whether our state home rule provisions allow circumventing this statute.⁵ Clarifying this rule by cementing it in the state constitution will avoid confusion for municipalities and noncitizens attempting to vote in the future.

Therefore, considering the confusion that different-level elections and a patchwork of local election rules can create for new arrivals to the country, this proposal would also help noncitizens avoid risking the accidental violation of state or federal law.

Conclusion

These bills are about ensuring fairness, transparency, and consistency in Maine's elections. By reserving the right to vote exclusively for U.S. citizens, this resolution strengthens our democratic system and preserves the sanctity of Maine's electoral process. Maine Policy Institute urges the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LDs 175 and 1437, reaffirming Maine's commitment to protecting the democratic rights of its citizens. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<https://mainemorningstar.com/2024/10/17/maine-sec-of-state-says-unsubstantiated-noncitizen-voting-claims-lay-groundwork-to-challenge-results/>

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<https://www.mainepublic.org/politics/2022-03-10/portland-charter-commission-endorses-local-voting-rights-for-non-citizen-residents>

⁴ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/US>

⁵ Supra mainepublic.org