



### **Testimony in Opposition to LD 1446:**

**“RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Lower the Voting Age to 16 Years of Age”**

Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Housing and Economic Development, 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 submit testimony in opposition to LD 1446.

This resolution would amend the Maine Constitution to reduce the minimum voting age from 18 to 16. While supporters may argue that 16- and 17-year-olds deserve a say in our democratic process, this proposal is misguided and inconsistent with the responsibilities and legal privileges granted to young Mainers under state and federal law.

To be clear, our organization deeply values civic education and youth engagement in public life—we are proud to partner with Waynflete School in co-facilitating the *Can We?* Project in high schools across the state.<sup>1</sup> But voting is not a classroom exercise—it's a serious civic responsibility with long-term consequences for our state and the nation. The franchise should be extended only to those who possess the legal and practical maturity to exercise it thoughtfully and responsibly. By nearly every other standard, society recognizes that 16-year-olds are not yet adults.

In Maine, 16-year-olds are legally prohibited from:

- Smoking or purchasing tobacco products or vaping (must be 21),
- Consuming or purchasing alcohol or recreational marijuana (must be 21),
- Signing most binding legal contracts (typically 18),
- Gambling or playing the lottery (must be 18 or 21, depending on the venue),
- Donating blood (must be 17),
- Getting a tattoo (must be 18),
- Getting married without parental and judicial approval (minimum 18, 17 with both judicial and parental approval),
- Consenting to all medical treatments (must be 18, with limited exceptions),
- Serving on juries (must be 18).

Why then would we allow someone too young to legally purchase a scratch ticket or get a tattoo to participate in electing governors and passing constitutional amendments? This

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.waynflete.org/community/the-can-we-project>



proposal sends a contradictory and confusing message about the maturity required to shape public policy.

Indeed, under this bill, the state would assert that voting is less consequential than marriage, less risky than gambling, and requires less deliberation than serving on a jury. We respectfully disagree. Choosing the leaders who determine tax policy, regulate business, authorize state spending, and decide matters of war and peace demands maturity, discernment, and life experience.

The age-old adage is, “Don’t get that tattoo — it could ruin your life.” But casting an unwise vote could ruin everybody’s lives. The same justifications that limit so many things to minors should also apply to the ballot box, which is why this proposal is so concerning.

Supporters claim that if 16-year-olds can work and pay taxes, they should have the right to vote. But by that logic, should we also allow them to purchase alcohol or serve on juries? The reality is that most 16- and 17-year-olds remain legally dependent on their parents or guardians, subject to parental control, and are ineligible for most adult responsibilities. This is not about taxation without representation—it’s about preserving a clear and consistent legal threshold for adulthood.

If we genuinely want to empower young people, we should not focus on extending them the ability to vote. Amending the Maine Constitution to grant the vote to teenagers prematurely would be an overreach, and one out of step with both Maine’s values and national norms. No U.S. state currently permits voting at 16 in statewide or federal elections, and for good reason.

The 26th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution reads, “The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged... on account of age.” Due to this federal preemption of state action, it is generally accepted that one must be 18 to vote in federal elections, unless a new U.S. constitutional amendment is passed.

This resolution would therefore create a piecemeal election system where 16- and 17-year-olds may only vote in state and local elections, but not in federal ones. If you accidentally vote for a federal office, the potential legal penalties could be significant, and avoiding that risk should be a high priority.

For these many reasons, we urge you to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on LD 1446. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to safeguarding the integrity of Maine’s democratic process.