

## **Testimony in Support of LDs 255 and 374, Geographic Distribution Requirements for Signatures Collected for Ballot Initiative Campaigns**

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck, and members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as the policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of both LD 255 & 374.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center supports these bills because they would change the constitutional requirements that dictate how signatures are gathered to put initiatives on the statewide ballot. The current law allows signatures to be collected from anywhere in the state, so long as the total number of signatures collected is equal to or greater than 10 percent of the total votes for governor in the last gubernatorial election.

LD 255 would necessitate that signatures are collected from both congressional districts and that the number of signatures from each congressional district be equal to or greater than 10 percent of the total vote for governor cast within that congressional district in the previous gubernatorial election. LD 374 would essentially do the same, but it replaces congressional districts with Maine's 35 state senate districts.

If passed, either bill would make certain that registered voters in rural Maine are not forgotten during the signature collection process. Article IV, Part Third, Section 18 of the state constitution currently enables entities that collect signatures for ballot initiative campaigns to spend their time and resources in southern Maine, because that is the least demanding location to collect signatures. While the prerogative of southern Maine voters is absolutely necessary in making statewide decisions, The Maine Heritage Policy Center believes residents in northern and central Maine need to have a proportionate say in these matters as well. Initiatives should reflect the interests of the statewide population, not just voters in southern Maine.

Of the 24 states with a citizen's initiative process, half of them employ geographic distribution requirements for signature collection to prevent major metropolitan areas from dictating what measures achieve ballot status.<sup>1</sup> For example, Nevada requires 112,544 signatures to be collected

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mainepolicy.org/project/willofthepeople/>

in total for an initiative to be put on a ballot. However, at least 28,136 need to be collected from each of Nevada's four congressional districts, allowing for equal representation among the state's diverse population.<sup>2</sup> Both bills would mandate that all of Maine is equally represented in terms of what goes on the statewide ballot.

More than 63,607 signatures would currently need to be collected and certified by the Secretary of State in order for a direct initiative to be put on the ballot.<sup>3</sup> LDs 255 and 374 would ensure that initiatives on the ballot represent the interests of all Maine people, and does so without increasing the required signature threshold. The only difference between these bills and current law is that petitioners would need to put more time and energy into making sure their proposals reflect the interests of all areas of the state.

To that end, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on both of these bills. Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://prezi.com/view/ZCbVg5K4sE0IAbSz6Zse/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/elec/results/results18.html#Nov6>