

Testimony to Support LD 534

"An Act To Make Ballot Questions Easier To Read and Understand for Maine Voters"

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck, and distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, my name is Adam Crepeau and I serve as the policy analyst for The Maine Heritage Policy Center. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 534, "An Act To Make Ballot Questions Easier To Read and Understand for Maine Voters."

The Maine Heritage Policy Center supports LD 534 because it mandates that all ballot questions are written at a sixth grade reading level and are required to state what the consequences of voting "yes" or "no" may be. Ensuring that questions on the ballot are easily understood by the entire eligible voting population is important, especially if the expectation is that voters will make an informed decision on these measures.

In 2017, a Ballotpedia study found that it takes a college degree or more to comprehend the average title of a ballot question in Maine.¹ Putting initiatives with complicated language on the ballot for all voters to decide on is unacceptable, especially since just over 30 percent of adults over 25 years of age have a bachelor's degree or higher in the state.² If the measurements of readability are accurate, the average Mainer may have difficulty comprehending ballot measures and therefore cannot make an informed decision on how they should vote. Many other state government documents are required to be written at a sixth grade reading level, including the Maine Residents Property Tax Program, notices regarding child support, municipal property tax deferral programs for seniors and temporary assistance for needy families.³

Further, a 2011 study featured in *Political Research Quarterly* found that the complexity of ballot question language correlated with higher rates voter roll-off, which is when referendums are left blank on voters' ballots.⁴ Ensuring ballot initiatives can be read at a sixth grade reading level will help alleviate this problem and allow more Mainers to make an informed decision on Election Day.

In addition to making ballot initiative language less complex, this bill requires the state to inform voters what a "yes" or "no" vote means on the ballot. Stating the effect of a "yes" or "no" vote will further alleviate any confusion that voters may have in the ballot box, encouraging increased participation in the electoral process. The Maine Heritage Policy Center believes this bill will benefit all Mainers.

With the findings that ballot initiative language is overly complex in Maine, and that this leads to more individuals skipping ballot questions in voting booths, we urge the committee to vote, "Ought to Pass" on this bill. Thank you.

¹ https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_measure_readability_scores,_2017#cite_note-RR2011-1

² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/me/EDU685217#EDU685217>

³ http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/display_ps.asp?id=534&PID=1456&snum=129

⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1065912909349629>; https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_measure_readability_scores,_2017#cite_note-RR2011-1

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