



A LETTER FROM ANNA

Executive Director,
League of Women
Voters of Maine

Ever since I was a high school student volunteering for my first political campaign, I have heard over and over again: “Why aren’t more young people voting and getting involved?” Over the years, I have thought a lot about how our voting and education systems need to change to make civic engagement a more natural part of life for young people. That’s why I’m proud that today League members aren’t just lamenting the generational divide in civic life, but proposing solutions and working together with the young activists who are already changing their communities.

One of the positive indicators we highlighted in our new State of Maine Democracy report (See PAGE 7) is the increase in youth voting. Historically, people have consistently been more likely to vote as they age. In contrast, in 2020, the youngest age group (18-24) voted at nearly the same rate (77.8%) as the oldest (65+) (78.5%). The difference between the 20-year

average and the 2020 participation rate is striking; voter turnout among 18-24 year olds was at least 20 percentage points higher than expected.

The League Youth Council is bringing together young Mainers who care about voting, and are now turning to advocacy on issues like online voter registration and the National Popular Vote. League members of all ages are rethinking how to deliver practical civic education both inside and outside the classroom.

We’re planning lots of exciting things for our biennial Convention (Friday, May 14, and Saturday, May 15), along the themes of youth engagement and civic education for Mainers (whatever their age). Convention will include a keynote address from Kei Kawashima Ginsberg, the Director of the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the premier resource nationwide on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. I hope you can join us!

Anna Kellar



TAKE ACTION

Taking action is easy with our new website and Legislator lookup forms. Learn more about our priority issues: lwmvme.org/TakeAction

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SAVE THE DATE



MAY 14 & 15, 2021

CALLING ALL MEMBERS

By Alison Smith & Ann Luther

Our biennial Convention is the biggest event on the League calendar. This is when we get together to share successes and plan for the next two years. Our theme this year is “Strengthening Democracy in the Next Century.” All are welcome! Join us as we plan future programs to protect voting rights, advocate for democracy reform, get big money out of politics, and safeguard free and fair elections.

This year, we’ll host the Convention on Zoom to make sure everyone can participate safely.

In addition to hearing some terrific speakers, including our National League President, we’ll elect a new board, plan our program, approve a budget, and more. Remember: only members can vote, so now is a great time to renew your membership and make sure you have your say. It’s a chance for League members to network with each other, with our staff, and with democracy experts from around the country.

We’ll kick off our virtual Convention on Friday evening with a welcome address from Dr. Deborah Turner, 20th president of the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) and chair of the Board of Trustees of the League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF). Dr. Turner will celebrate with us as we enter our 101st year of making democracy work, and she’ll let us know what the League is up to in Washington, D.C., and around the country, too.

On Saturday, you’ll have a chance to meet new and returning nominees to the board and hear from our new Youth Council. Kei Kawashima-

Ginsberg will address our Convention. Kei is Director of the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the premier resource nationwide on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. We’ll have two plenary sessions in which we present and vote on board nominees, program, and other items.

Our mighty Maine League had amazing success in our Centennial Year. We stand out nationally because of the size of our impact, the strength of our vision, and the momentum behind our membership, volunteer efforts, and advocacy work. We adapted quickly to the realities of the global pandemic, and we engaged in high-impact activities that made a real difference in an important election year. We aim to carry that momentum into 2021 and 2022 with the exciting and ambitious proposed program.

There is no registration fee for Convention this year, though donations are welcome.

Join us as we launch our second century together!

REGISTER ONLINE

You can register online for Convention at **lwvme.org/Convention**.

If you want to become a League member, sign up online at **lwvme.org/Member**.

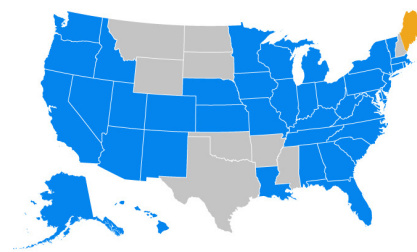
THE MOST IMPORTANT VOTING RIGHTS BILL IN MAINE

By Will Hayward

One of our top priorities this legislative session has been advocating for the passage of online voter registration (OVR). Online voter registration would allow eligible Mainers to register to vote conveniently and safely at home. As the closures of town offices and mail delays during COVID have demonstrated, Mainers need additional options to register to vote. Currently, 40 other states allow voters to register to vote online. We think it's long overdue for Maine to join these states in providing this safe, secure, and convenient option for voter registration.

The bill the League is supporting is LD 1126, An Act To Update the Voter Registration Process, sponsored by Rep. Teresa Pierce. This bill would create an online portal where voters could register or update their registration.

LD 1126 had its public hearing on Monday, April 5,



**40 states
allow for
online
voter
registration.**

in the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. At the hearing, the League and many Mainers and other organizations testified on the importance of online voter registration. The League is continuing to follow and advocate for LD 1126 as we hope it proceeds to a committee work session, votes on the House and Senate floor, and to the Governor to be signed into law.

Lawmakers need to hear from their constituents to know that this is a priority. To contact your lawmakers and ask them to support LD 1126, visit [lwvme.org/TakeAction](https://www.lwvme.org/TakeAction). There you can learn more about the bill and send an email to your legislators urging them to support LD 1126. Together, we can help maintain and improve Maine's legacy of safe, secure, and convenient voter access.

THE MOST IMPORTANT VOTING RIGHTS BILL IN THE U.S.

By Anna Kellar

It's no exaggeration to say that the For the People Act (H.R. 1/ S. 1) is the most important piece of democracy reform legislation since the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The For the People Act is our best hope to stop the waves of voter suppression legislation that are proposed and passing in legislatures around the country. As of March 24, 361 bills to restrict the vote have been introduced in 47 states. In states like Georgia, Texas and Arizona, state legislatures may succeed in passing restrictions that end up making it harder to vote, especially for people of color. While local organizers are doing amazing work, they face tough political odds. We can't depend on the Supreme Court either, which struck down parts of the Voting Rights Act in 2013, and has refused to intervene in other voting rights cases.

The For the People Act would require every state to have accessible voter registration (with automatic, online, and same day registration), no-excuse absentee ballots, and a minimum period of early voting. These pro-voter provisions — most of which Maine already enjoys — would override restrictive state laws.

It's not just about the bad practices that this bill will stop. We have the opportunity to actually invest in the democracy we want to have. The For the People Act establishes a small donor funding system for candidates for Congress, similar to Maine Clean Elections. It strengthens disclosure and anti-corruption practices, and helps ensure our Senators and Representatives are truly representing us, and not their wealthy donors. It would grant voting representation to the citizens of Washington D.C., invest in election security in every state, and establish independent redistricting commissions, which would stop the worst political gerrymandering and improve representation in both Congress and state legislatures.

As H.R. 1, the For the People Act passed the House of Representatives in March (with the support of Reps. Pingree and Golden). Now it is being taken up as S. 1 in the Senate, where it is likely to pass or fail by the slimmest of margins. This is the time to call Senator King and Senator Collins. The most important vote of their careers is coming up. Call 1.888.453.3211 — Tell Senators King and Collins to support the For the People Act.

“Let individuals contribute as they desire: but let us prohibit in effective fashion all corporations from making contributions for any political purpose, directly or indirectly.”

— Theodore Roosevelt, December 3, 1906
Sixth Annual Message

IT IS TIME FOR MAINE TO TELL CORPORATIONS THAT OUR DEMOCRACY IS NOT FOR SALE

Maine should ban corporate campaign contributions.

By John Brautigam

Thanks to legislation developed by the League of Women Voters of Maine, the Legislature is poised to address one of the glaring omissions in Maine campaign finance law: corporate contributions directly to candidates and to political action committees they control. Federal law has banned corporate contributions for over 100 years, and 22 other states have also enacted bans. Maine should join them.

Research by Maine Citizens for Clean Elections shows that corporations with large bankrolls and unique agendas continue to curry favor by giving directly to individual candidates and “leadership PACs” controlled by those candidates. It is time for Maine to end this practice and join other jurisdictions that have recognized the dangers of unchecked corporate influence over our political system.

Notorious decisions such as *Citizens United* (C.U.) argued that corporations are entitled to the same rights as real people, and that their political spending is protected by the First Amendment. Money is speech, don’t you know. But few decisions have drawn such universal condemnation and rebuke, and the League has long argued that C.U. and others in a similar vein are a threat to our democracy. Yet even these misguided rulings do not prohibit states from banning corporate contributions directly to candidates when necessary to protect vital state interests.

In Maine, Clean Elections candidates cannot accept contributions from corporations. Only registered voters may make qualifying contributions, and even seed money can only be given by actual human contributors. Privately funded candidates for the legislature or for governor, however, can receive contributions from any source (other than foreign nationals). Frequent contributors include mega-corporations in the health insurance, finance, pharmaceutical, chemical, and energy industries — all with specific business interests in Augusta.

Mainers can — and should — curtail the undue influence of large corporate war chests tied to special interests that don’t align with what is best for Maine people. It is time to close the tap and shut off the flow of corporate treasury funds to the people we elect to represent us, our families, and our neighbors. Officers, employees, and individual shareholders of a business can contribute. But keep the corporate money out.

Separately, soon Maine legislators will also vote on a measure to curtail contributions from foreign sources. Federal law already includes some limits on money from abroad, but does not effectively prevent contributors under the influence of foreign interests from affecting — or even dominating — our candidate and ballot question elections. LWVME also supports measures to supplement the federal law on foreign campaign contributions with a tough law of our own.

THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

By Evan Tess Murray

Last fall, we formed a Youth Council made up of young people, mostly high school students, who wanted to help get out the vote — both by talking with their peers and by encouraging young folks to talk with their parents, neighbors, and older friends. November 2020 ultimately saw record turnout among youth. But in the case of our Youth Council, their engagement lasted beyond the election. The most engaged of them formed a steering committee to guide the council.

This year, the Youth Council has met once a month. They've sought out trainings for their members on how to track bills, advocate for issues with legislators, write letters to the editor, and testify at public hearings. They're interested in some of the League's issues, including the National Popular Vote and online voter registration, and they've also picked up one of their own: a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 16. They organized multiple educational events to encourage discussion of the voting age, framing it as a voting rights issue, and

several of them testified in front of the Veterans and Legal Affairs committee (VLA).

Engaging young people in the work of the League means creating space within our organization for their voices, encouraging them to organize, inviting them to participate in our advocacy work, and offering them the resources they need to strengthen their voices. But the Youth Council is only one piece — one exciting piece — of our increasing focus on youth outreach. Our Youth Engagement Project works to connect with educators and other organizations; Maine Students Vote creates support for democratic engagement on college campuses.

We've found, along the way, that intergenerational conversations about our issues help us to understand them more deeply and from a variety of perspectives. The young people we work with are passionately committed to democracy as an ideal, and we're excited to continue to invite, support, and empower them.



Learn more about becoming a member!
lwvme.org/Member

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: GLORIA

Gloria started looking for volunteer opportunities at the start of the new year, specifically related to civic engagement. She wanted to do something that would bring about positive and lasting change. A few Google searches later, she came across the League of Women Voters of Maine.

"At the start of the new year, I felt a growing pressure to look for a volunteer opportunity related to civic engagement. I didn't know what exactly, but I wanted to do something that would bring positive and lasting change. I googled around and came across this project by the University of Pennsylvania's Center for High Impact Philanthropy. They had basically created a guide for donors on impressive nonprofits that work towards strengthening our democracy. I started reading the guide, thinking it would help me search for similar groups in Maine. But one of the organizations they highlighted was the League of Women Voters Maine — I couldn't believe it. The guide talked through countless examples of the League's impact from restoring same-day voter registration to campaign finance reform to passing ranked-choice voting. I was so fired up after reading, that I paid my membership dues that day."



national popular vote

By Lori Calderone

The 2020 presidential election added one more near-miss to the pile of presidential election near-misses — elections where the national popular vote winner came dangerously close to losing the Electoral College vote. Had just 22,000 votes shifted in just three states, Joe Biden would have lost an election that he won by 7 million votes nationally.

The National Popular Vote bill, which is before the Maine legislature this session, will ensure that presidential elections are no longer like a roulette game; instead, the candidate who wins the most votes across all 50 states and Washington D.C., will always win the presidency.

State winner-take-all laws (including Maine's District winner-take-all law) ignore and silence every vote not cast for the majority winner in the state or district. In the 2020 election 43% of Mainers' presidential votes did not matter:

Mainers not voting for Biden in the First District totaled 176,736. These votes didn't matter. Biden won the First District.

Mainers not voting for Donald Trump in the Second District totaled 179,657. These votes didn't matter. Trump won the Second District.

Millions of voters of all parties are ignored in the same way in every state in every presidential election. And, 3/4 of the states (including Maine) are largely ignored, whether rural, urban, large or small, because they're not competitive; they've voted reliably for the Republican or the Democratic candidate in the last five elections, so there's no reason for either party to pay attention to their voters or issues.

When every vote in every state is equal and politically relevant, candidates will vie for every vote in every state — no longer will just few very tight state races attract all the candidates' attention, campaign spending, and policy focus. Cuban policy garners huge attention every four years (but not logging, lobstering, climate change, or rural broadband) simply because 200,000 Cuban Americans in Florida can determine who wins the presidency.

Both parties have the ability to win a national popular vote in this closely divided country, once they take their focus off of swing states and campaign nationally for every vote. It's time for the people to pick the president!

>>> GET CONNECTED!

- + Request a speaker to present on the topic for a civic or community group of which you are a part: lvmme.org/NPV.
- + Contact your legislator and ask them to support the bill: lvmme.org/TakeAction.
- + Like and follow our Facebook page Mainers for National Popular Vote. The handle is [@MaineNPV](https://www.facebook.com/MaineNPV).
- + Submit a letter to the editor to your community newspaper or one of Maine's major dailies: lvmme.org/NPV.
- + Attend one of our Friend to Friend Organizing Workshops: lvmme.org/Events.

NEW REPORT ON THE STATE OF OUR DEMOCRACY

By Jen Lancaster

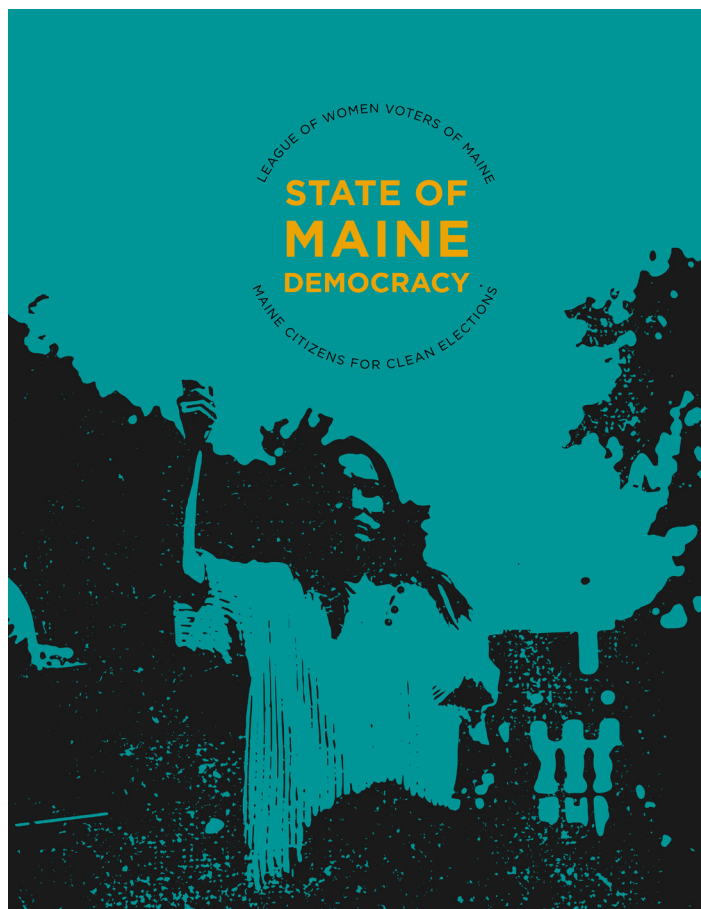
After a tumultuous year in American politics, Democracy Maine releases the second edition of their report, State of Maine Democracy, that assesses the health of the state's government and democracy. The first edition was released in April 2020, just after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report offers a broad and objective perspective on Maine's democracy in several selected areas, including the effect of poverty on voter turnout, voting rights and barriers to voting, election methods, conduct of elections, money in politics, newspapers and media access, and more.

In each chapter, key indicators show whether certain trends in Maine are positive or negative. Where possible, the report compares Maine with other states to provide a larger context.

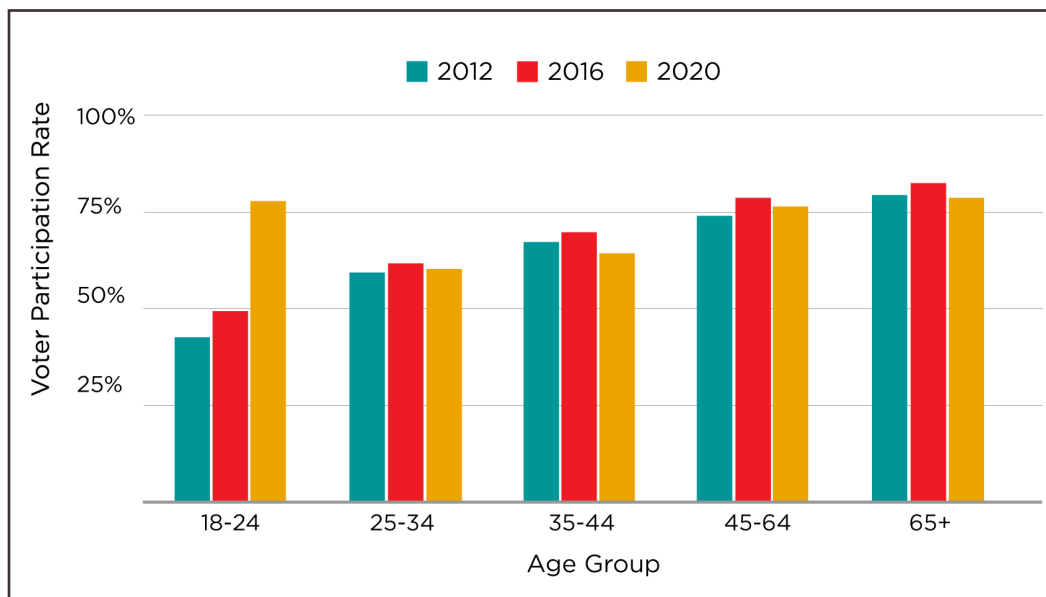
"Overall, we find that Maine ranks high as a democratically governed state, and we should be justifiably proud of our record," said Anna Kellar, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Maine. "But there are still some areas that bear watching or where we need to improve."

This report examines and assesses the state of democracy in Maine using publicly-available data, published reports, and research conducted by Democracy Maine, a collaboration between the League of Women Voters of Maine (LWVME) and Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE).



Read it online: lwvme.org/StateOfDemocracy

BELOW: Voter Participation in Past Presidential Election Years



HIGHLIGHT:

In a huge election year rocked by COVID-19, Maine's government faced a number of challenges at the local and state level. Election officials, workers, and volunteers rose to the challenge to conduct a well-run 2020 general election, which saw a record voter turnout, especially among young people.



ELECTION INFORMATION YOU NEED **VOTE 411**

SCAN ME TO VISIT
VOTE411.ORG



There will be a number of municipal elections in June 2021, including a Charter Commission election in Portland. As usual, we are uploading candidate and ballot information to **Vote411.org**. We encourage you to look up your personalized voter information on Vote411.

On **Vote411.org**, you can:

- + See What's On Your Ballot
- + Check Your Voter Registration
- + Find Your Polling Place
- + And Much More!

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