



TO: The Honorable Craig Hickman

The Honorable Laura Supica, Co-Chairs

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: April 12, 2023

RE: LD 1416 – RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Increase the Percentage of the Population Required to Submit a State Referendum Question

Good morning Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee.

My name is Will Hayward. I'm a resident of Portland. I am here today as the Advocacy Program Coordinator for the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am testifying in opposition on LD 1416.

The League of Women Voters of Maine supports protecting the right of Maine citizens to propose and veto legislation through a state-wide, citizen-initiated petition process. We support keeping that process accessible to ordinary citizens. By raising the threshold of signatures required from 10% to 25% of the last gubernatorial turnout, which would be the highest percentage threshold for citizens initiative ballot access in the country, LD 1416 stands in contradiction to these values.

We believe current thresholds established in the Maine Constitution establish a good balance between access to the citizens initiative process and preventing abuse of the process. There have been 10 citizen initiatives sent to the ballot over the past decade, an average of one per year. This does not suggest a process that is being abused. Indeed, citizen initiative efforts routinely fall short of the ballot, indicating that there are already significant hurdles to ballot qualification. Raising the threshold to 25% would set a bar for access that could prove impossibly high except for the most heavily funded efforts. This would have the effect of taking the "citizens" out of citizen initiatives — organized volunteers would not be able to do it; only moneyed interests would have a chance.

Across the nation, there has been a recent trend of legislatures limiting the voice of citizens by acting to restrict the citizens initiative process, whether by raising signature thresholds, imposing geographic requirements for signatures, or by raising the percentage in support required to pass an initiative. We ask this committee to ensure that Maine does not join the states restricting this crucial right, and vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1416.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

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