



TO: The Honorable Louis Luchini
The Honorable John Schneck, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 27th, 2019

RE: LD 534, An Act To Make Ballot Questions Easier To Read and Understand for
Maine Voters

Senator Luchini, Representative Schneck, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of LD 534.

My name is Sarah Rawlings and I am the Advocacy and Organizing Director for the League of Women Voters of Maine and Maine Citizens for Clean Elections.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major political policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

For 100 years, Leagues here in Maine and across the country have worked to educate and register voters, eliminate obstacles to voting, and make government at all levels more accessible and responsive to citizens. The League supports full voter participation by all eligible American citizens, and we oppose efforts to create new barriers that block citizens' constitutional right to vote. Through print and online resources, including our Easy-to-Read Voter Guide, the League works to equip voters with essential information about the election process, ballot questions, and much more.

For the last 11 years, the League of Women Voters of Maine has produced and distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of our Easy-to-Read Voter Guide across the state, and the feedback we receive about the guide consistently demonstrates that Mainers want and appreciate nonpartisan, easy to understand information about voting and elections. We recognize that resources that provide such information are not always easy to come by or presented in a manner that is easy for voters to comprehend, and it is for this reason that we partner with the Literacy Volunteers of Maine in editing our guide for readability and accessibility.

The Literacy Volunteers of Greater Augusta, with whom we worked on our most recent Voter Guide, “believe that the ability to read and write, to understand and be understood, is critical to personal freedom and the maintenance of a democratic society. [They] recognize literacy as an integral element in the broader goals of economic opportunity and security, social justice, and dignity.”¹ In advance of writing this testimony, the League consulted with Virginia Marriner, Executive Director of Literacy Volunteers of Greater Augusta and Stan Eames, Literacy volunteer tutor and former newspaper editor, about this bill. We are pleased to share with this committee that Literacy Volunteers of Greater Augusta fully supports this effort to make ballot questions easier to understand. Literacy Volunteers of Greater Augusta also concurred that a 6th grade reading level, as prescribed in LD 534, is best for the average reader.

That said, we’d propose one friendly amendment to this bill to clarify that ballot questions should be written at *as close to a 6th grade reading level as possible*, rather than constraining them to “no higher than a 6th grade reading level.” We know from experience with our Easy-to-Read Voter Guide that there are sometimes technical terms for which no lay language substitution is adequate. The inclusion of that technical language may necessarily bump the reading level of those questions above the 6th grade level.

We applaud Representative Andrews’ effort to lower the barriers to entry into our political process by ensuring that voters fully understand the language, intent, and practical consequences of ballot initiatives they are voting on, in order to make informed decisions at the polls.

We respectfully urge that this Committee vote “ought to pass” on LD 534.

¹ <https://lva-augusta.org/mission/>