



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Garrett Mason
The Honorable Representative Louis Luchini, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: May 10, 2017

RE: LD 1591 An Act To Strengthen the Restrictions Governing Lobbying by Former Legislators and Former Executive Branch Officials

The League of Women Voters of Maine supports efforts to strengthen current “revolving door” legislation to prohibit all lobbying by former Legislators and key executive branch employees for one year following the end of their legislative service. Maine is one of 34 states with limits on such lobbying. We agree that this proposal is a step in the right direction.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people and that it should be free from undue influence, corruption, and the appearance of corruption. We also believe that good public policy results from vigorous and open debate in which all voices are heard.

The League of Women Voters of Maine has supported past efforts to establish and tighten the so called revolving door. Then and now, we are pleased to lend our voice and efforts to such legislation that will benefit the political process, aid in transparency, and reassure our citizens about the integrity of our government.

Lobbying activities are protected by the First Amendment: Congress shall make no law abridging the right of the people "to petition the government for a redress of grievances." Yet the rise over the last two centuries of a lobbying system dominated by paid lobbyists has resulted in a system where access to this right is tilted in favor of those who can pay.

Questions of fair access may be exacerbated when some lobbyists have easier access to lawmakers than others, especially for “revolving door” lobbyists – those former legislators or executive branch officials who leave the government to go into the private sector and work to influence their former colleagues.

Additional concerns arise that serving legislators and government officials might be influenced by the prospect of future employment. Legislators or regulators might seek to

ingratiate themselves with lobbying firms or lobbyist employers by favoring their interests. Even if it's only the appearance of favoritism, the appearance factor is important to helping citizens keep faith with their government and reduce their skepticism about public officials and public institutions.

Allowing a "cooling off" period before accepting a lobbying job can lessen any suspicion that a legislator or other government officials is beholden to any special interest.

One final note: the League has long been opposed to term limits. We note with irony that term limits have deprived the legislature itself of the service and expertise of many skilled legislators who are interested in and adept at the development and implementation of public policy. The legislature itself has been weakened as a result. In the meantime, power and experience have been professionalized and transferred to the paid lobbyists. This has arguably made our democracy less accountable to the will of the people, not more.

The proposal presented here strengthens the one-year cooling-off period during which former legislators and key executive branch employees may not lobby. The League supports this proposal. We believe it will contribute to public confidence in government.

Ann Luther
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