



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator John L. Tuttle, Jr.
The Honorable Representative Louis J. Luchini, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 20, 2013

RE: LD 184 An Act To Enhance Transparency in Government by Implementing a
Waiting Period for Legislators before They May Register as Lobbyists

Good morning. My name is Ann Luther. I'm the Advocacy Chair of the League of Women Voters of Maine, a volunteer, and a resident of Trenton. The League of Women Voters of Maine submits the following testimony in support of LD 184.

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.

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

Allowing a "cooling off" period before accepting a lobbying job can lessen any suspicion that a legislator 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 in LD 184 establishes a one-year cooling-off period during which former legislators may not register as lobbyists. The League supports this proposal. We believe it will help to prevent self-interest from subtly distorting the motivations of sitting legislators and that it will contribute to public confidence in government. According to the National Council of State Legislatures, Maine is one of only 15 states around the country that has no cooling off provisions whatsoever to prevent former legislators from going to work directly as lobbyists.¹ We urge you to recommend passage of LD 184.

Ann Luther
Advocacy Chair
League of Women Voters of Maine

¹ <http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/ethicshome/50-state-table-revolving-door-prohibitions.aspx>