



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

PO Box 863
Augusta, ME 04332-0863

(207) 622-0256
lwvme@gwi.net

TO: The Honorable Senator Lisa T. Marraché
The Honorable Representative John L. Patrick, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on Legal and Veterans Affairs

RE: LD 42 An Act To Repeal Term Limits for Legislators

Sponsor: Senator Strimling

The League of Women Voters of Maine (“LWVME”) is pleased to submit the following testimony concerning LD 42. Promoting an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive is key to our democracy and central to the mission of the League of Women Voters. Because we believe that term limits adversely affect the representativeness, accountability, and effective performance of the Legislature, we urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 42.

The League of Women Voters of Maine has opposed term limits since 1991. We worked in opposition to term limits when this issue came before the citizens of Maine in 1993. Our original position is unchanged and our objections to term limits have only been bolstered and reinforced by Maine’s experience since term limits went into effect in 1996.

Term limits violate the ultimate right of voters to choose the representatives who best serve the needs of their district and the State of Maine. By disqualifying experienced and capable legislators, term limits make our government less representative of voters, less accountable, and less effective.

Originally, term limit advocates suggested that competition for seats would increase with less-entrenched incumbents. Instead, the opposite has occurred. Potential challengers wait to run until there is an open seat once a legislator has been term limited. In addition, the number of primaries has decreased substantially thereby limiting competition. Statistics show that House elections in particular have become less competitive -- more are being won by 10 points or more.¹

By disqualifying legislators who have been able to gain skill through experience, term limits dilute the effective performance of the Legislature and weaken the Legislature’s role in crafting sound policy solutions to complex problems. For example, without experience and knowledge of what has occurred in the past, many of the same ideas are raised over and over.² Furthermore, the policy expertise formerly reposed in Legislative Committees has been ceded to Executive Branch department heads and partisan professional staff.³ In addition, because legislators want to act quickly on their priority issues, they are more likely to focus on short term, urgent topics,⁴ rather than complex, long-term issues.⁵

¹ *First in the Nation: Term Limits and the Maine Legislature*, Richard Powell & Rich Jones, National Conference of State Legislatures’ Joint Project on Term Limits, 2004, p. 6 available at <http://www.ncsl.org/jptl/casestudies/Maine-FinalReportv2.pdf>

² *Ibid*, p. 27

³ *Ibid*, pp. 33, 61

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 46

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 25, 19.

By decreasing the power of the Legislature, term limits has upset the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches.⁶ In addition, term limits have effectively restructured the bicameral relationship between the House and the Senate, with the Senate becoming much more influential. Because many Senators previously served in the House, they are more experienced and power has thus migrated more to the Senate.⁷

Finally, the League of Women Voters believes in representative government. We believe that term limits should be repealed, and we would urge the Committee and the Legislature to have the courage to do this in the Legislature without sending the issue to the voters as a referendum question.

On behalf of the League of Women Voters of Maine, I urge you to follow the lead of Idaho and Utah which repealed term limits laws in 2002 and 2003 respectively. We urge you to vote “ought to Pass” on LD 42.

Ann Luther, President
League of Women Voters of Maine
May 4, 2007

⁶ **Ibid. p. 60**

⁷Ibid, p. 5, 16