



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Rodney Wittemore
The Honorable Representative Roland Danny Martin, Co-chairs
The Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

DATE: April 6, 2015

RE: LD 1012 – RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To
Increase the Length of Terms of Senators

My name is Polly Ward. I am a member of the Board of Directors of the League of Women Voters of Maine. I am a resident of Freeport. I am here today as a volunteer member of the League's Advocacy Committee to testify *Neither for nor Against* LD 1012 – RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Increase the Length of Terms of Senators.

The League of Women Voters has opposed legislative term limits in Maine for over twenty years. Promoting an open governmental system that is responsive, accountable, and representative is key to our democracy and central to the mission of the League of Women Voters. Because we believe that term limits adversely affect responsiveness, accountability, and representativeness, we testified several weeks ago in support of LD 182 – An Act To Eliminate Term Limits for Legislators. We believe that term limits violate the ultimate right of voters to choose the representatives who best serve the needs of their districts 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.

The proposed amendment to the Constitution would increase the terms of Senators from two to four years. This amendment would change the number of years that Senators could serve from eight to sixteen years, if Title 21-A, MRSA, §553(1) remains as it is today. This could help to address our concern that term limits dilute the effective performance of the Legislature in crafting sound policy solutions to complex problems. However, this will only partially address our concern with respect to the Senate. Not changing the terms of members of the House of Representatives would continue the current turnover in that body and may have some additional, unintended consequences.

In our testimony on LD 182 – An Act To Eliminate Term Limits for Legislators, we raised a concern that term limits have effectively restructured the bicameral relationship between the House and the Senate, with the Senate becoming more knowledgeable and influential due to the migration of former House members to the Senate. This Resolution would likely make that imbalance even larger due to the increased opportunity for members of the Senate to develop greater policy expertise due to their longer tenure. Furthermore, if the extended Senate terms meant that there were fewer open seats in Senate races, this might mean fewer opportunities for members of the House to advance to the Senate, giving term limits in the House more finality.

We continue to believe that term limits should be repealed. Rather than amending the Constitution, we urge the committee to repeal term limits by voting Ought to Pass on LD 182 – An Act To Eliminate Term Limits for Legislators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments *Neither for nor Against* LD 1012.