



Testimony in support of
S.448 An Act ensuring municipal participation of the widest eligible range
(the EMPOWER Act)
H.794 An Act establishing health voting habits among youth
Submitted to the Joint Committee on Election Laws
By Nancy Brumback, LWVMA Election and Voting Legislative Specialist
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These two bills would give cities and towns the right to lower the age of participation in local elections to 16 or 17 if they choose to do so—without requiring approval from the state legislature. Some towns have passed provisions to lower the voting age in municipal elections in the past, but such changes are currently required to receive legislative approval, and the legislature has not approved any of those requests.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, views these bills as both a voting issue and a home rule issue.

As a home rule issue, if a city or town decides to extend the right to vote in its local elections to 16- or 17-year-olds, it should have the right to do so without the approval of the state legislature. Municipalities make other decisions on their own about how their elections are conducted. Decisions on who can vote in municipal elections should not require approval by the legislature. LWVMA has as a stated goal “home rule for Massachusetts cities and towns in local matters.” We note that “a disproportionate number of bills dealt with in the Legislature are so-called home rules bills, i.e. bylaw changes and matters passed by city councils or town meetings. Many of these matters should not have to go before the Legislature.” [*Where We Stand, pp.23-24.*](#)

As a voting issue, we believe engaging voters as early as possible tends to produce life-long voters. Allowing teens to vote in local elections would increase their interest (and maybe their parents’ interest) in local issues, especially if that’s the only election they can vote in. They won’t have the “distraction” of the more dramatic presidential or gubernatorial races. The argument could especially be made that high school students should be allowed to vote in school committee elections that directly affect them. The League has just recently advocated for a strong civics education curriculum, and voting in local elections would make that curriculum real. We would hope the experience would increase their interest and voting in local elections as adults.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts urges the legislature to give up its veto on who can vote in local elections. We ask this committee to report favorably a bill allowing cities and towns to decide if they want to lower the voting age for local elections.

Thank you for your consideration.