



Legislation Summary:

An Act ensuring municipal participation of the widest eligible range

Initial bill number(s): S. 438

Sponsors: Sen. Rebecca Rausch

What the bill does, why LWVMA supports or opposes it, and the League position relative to this bill.

This bill would give cities or 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 passed any of those requests.

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 about how their elections are conducted. Decisions on who can vote in municipal elections should not require approval by the legislature. See the League position below on home rule.

LWVMA has stated as a goal “home rule for Massachusetts cities and towns in local matters.” It noted that: “In the late 1960s, the Special Home Rule Commission recommended legislation to facilitate the use of home rule, but the General Court did not accept any of its proposals. The governor, in 1975, established a home rule committee to explore ways to strengthen implementation of home rule. The committee, on which the League was represented, reviewed the state statutes governing municipal affairs and recommended a number of changes. The Legislature, however, has been reluctant to relinquish its authority in local matters. As a result, 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