

Hello, my name is Katie Stevenson and I'm a Bates College Senior from Ewing, New Jersey. Before I start, I'd like to ask you all to do me a favor. I'd like each of you to take a second and think to yourself about the first time you voted. I imagine that many of you voted because you felt passionately about a particular election or ballot issue. Some of you may have voted because you felt that it was your responsibility. A few of you may have just been dragged there by someone else who thought it was your responsibility. Regardless of the reason, I'm willing to bet that most, if not all of you, first voted in the place that, at the time, you called home.

The first time I voted was in the 2013 local elections in Lewiston, during my first semester at Bates. In addition to taking classes, I spent that semester tutoring in a local fourth grade classroom and running an afterschool arts program in a nearby neighborhood. I quickly grew to really care about the kids I worked with and found the time I spent with them far more important than much of the other academic work I was doing. In that election, I cast my vote for my students, knowing that as children, who was elected would have a far greater impact on their futures than mine, even if I never moved out of Lewiston.

Three years later, I have still, only ever cast my vote in Maine and the number of reasons I am voting has significantly expanded. Lewiston is my community. Maine is my home. When I vote here, I'm doing much more than exercising my constitutional right. When I vote, I'm voting for the cashiers I know at my CVS on Sabattus Street and for the guys that fix my bike at Rainbow Cycles on Lisbon. I'm voting for my doctors in Auburn. I'm voting for my niece who lives in Damariscotta and my brother's next door neighbors in Waldoboro. I'm voting for the folks who run the farm in Turner where I've spent so many Sunday morning meals and for the folks at Forage who make the best breakfast sandwiches known to man.

Ever since that first time I've voted, I've continued to work in Lewiston. This past year I've been volunteering ten to twenty hours a week to conduct research at Androscoggin County Jail, at their request. Next time I vote, I'm voting for them.

When I was looking at colleges, my mom told me to go to a school somewhere I thought I might like to live one day, as a way to test it out. Her advice turned out to be pretty good. After I graduate this year, I'll be attending medical school in a program specifically aimed at addressing the physician shortage in Maine. Ten years from now, I plan to be treating patients in this state that has been so welcoming to me, as an out-of-state student, for the past four years.

This story of coming to Maine for school and staying here to work is incredibly common among college students. And seeing as Maine's population is the oldest in the country, this seems exceptionally important. That being said, I find it confusing that we are discussing a bill which seems to actively deter college age students from politically and emotionally investing in this state.

Before I leave, I'd like to ask you to do just one more favor. You can do it now, or sometime later. But I ask you to remember that first time you voted and think about what path led you from casting that ballot to sitting here today.

Thank you.