



# Maine Municipal Association

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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association  
In Opposition to LD 1056  
An Act To Require Local Voter Approval for Charter Schools  
April 1, 2013

Senator Millett, Representative MacDonald, members of the Education Committee, my name is Geoff Herman and I am testifying in opposition to LD 1056 on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association.

A first-blush reason why MMA's Legislative Policy Committee voted to oppose LD 1056 is because the management of the election process appears uncoordinated and potentially expensive. As municipal officials understand it, each charter school has a designated "catchment" area that defines which municipalities would have to conduct this approval referendum. The catchment area could be a fairly broad multi-municipal region or even the entire state. Multi-municipal elections that are not statewide elections are currently conducted on either a school district level or a county level. How the "catchment area" elections would be centrally managed is entirely unclear. Who would notify the municipal officers to post the warrant? Who would be ultimately responsible for the management of the election? Who would schedule the date of the election? To whom would the municipal election clerks report the results?

To give a sense of the potential costs, a statewide election on the establishment of a charter school would cost Maine's property taxpayers \$1 million if conducted on a date other than the date of a general or primary election. If conducted on a regularly scheduled election date, it would cost some share of that \$1 million to cover the costs of preparing and distributing absentee ballots and otherwise process the balloting of the particular charter school question.

Our Legislative Policy Committee also felt that LD 1056 would have the probable result of ensuring that no charter schools would be approved, at least as a general rule. Given the way charter schools are currently funded by redistributing local appropriations intended for the pre-existing public schools, the arguments against approving the establishment of a charter school that financially compete with the larger and more dominant public non-charter school would undoubtedly prevail.

The observation made by our Policy Committee was that if the voters of the state do not want to have charter schools, that decision should be made on their behalf by the Legislature, and not carried out by putting cumbersome election procedures in front of each charter school...elections which would generally have foregone conclusions.