



**League of Women Voters
New Hampshire**

January 20, 2015

Senator Regina Birdsell, Chair
Public and Municipal Affairs Committee
Re: SB 486, AN ACT relative to election assistance for cities and towns

Dear Senator Birdsell and members of the committee,

For more than 90 years, the League of Women Voters NH has worked to make sure that the Constitution's guarantee of the right to vote is a reality for the people of our state. Along with providing nonpartisan information about voting, LWVNH speaks out against laws that create barriers to voting that discourage or even prevent qualified citizens from being able to register to vote or cast a ballot.

The League supports SB 486 and encourages the committee to vote *Ought to Pass* on this bill.

Although New Hampshire holds the "First in the Nation Primary" every four years and prides itself on voter engagement, the truth is that New Hampshire residents face some of the most complex voting and election regulations in the country with virtually no educational outreach from the government. Most states provide citizens with timely, accurate and extensive education regarding every state and national election. New Hampshire's voting and elections website information is difficult to access, badly written and, all too often incorrect.

Unfortunately, although some towns step in to provide information, not all do. SB 486 calls for the secretary of state to maintain an internet website that includes complete, current, and accurate information on voting and election procedures for the states' voters. The League would add that the information should be well written and easy to understand. We have included some samples of handouts the League of Women Voters NH has developed that indicate the kind of information that should be available. We have also included samples of some of the handouts we have developed for those whose first language is not English. Our website www.LWVNH.org currently offers English, Spanish, Portuguese and Nepalese voting and registering to vote information. We hope to add French and Russian very soon, and we thank the New Hampshire citizens who volunteered to do the translations for us.

We had hoped this bill would include a provision that the secretary of state develop a template for town websites that would include election and voting information and allow towns to add local information. Members of the League have surveyed town websites several times over the past several years and found that, although some are very good, many show too little, inaccurate, or no information at all. The League has developed a template that any town may use which provides a good model of what the secretary of state should be offering. We've included an example of a good town website and the link to the League's website template is: http://www.lwvnh.org/sample_town_website.html

Section V of SB 486 calls for the secretary of state to assist cities and towns with local elections. The secretary currently has about \$15 million dollars in HAVA funds which were given to the state to make voting and elections accessible and to educate election officials and the public. It's shocking to us that

the funds have not been used, to any real extent, for those purposes. Building buildings and underwriting continuing costs of the office are not what we understand to be the purpose of HAVA funds.

We hope the committee will take some time to look at what volunteer organizations such as the League have been doing to help voters and then, look and see what other states are doing thanks to the impetus and money they received from HAVA funding. It's really long past time for New Hampshire to take proper advantage of the resources that were given to the state for modernizing its voting systems and helping make voting accessible to all its citizens.

The League of Women Voters urges the committee to vote *Ought to Pass* on SB 486.

Thank you,

Liz Tentarelli, president

Joan Flood Ashwell, election law specialist

League of Women Voters NH

www.LWVNH.org