



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
NEW HAMPSHIRE

www.LWVNH.org

4 Park St. Room 200
Concord, NH 03301

April 4, 2017

To Chair Griffith and members of the House Election Law Committee

Re: SB 108, amendment relative to ratifying elections postponed from March 14, 2017.

The League of Women Voters NH is a nonpartisan organization that encourages citizens to take an interest in politics and to vote. We support efforts to make all voters feel their votes are important. **The League of Women Voters NH urges the committee to amend SB108 further, to ratify postponed election results without need of another town election.**

The League listened to the testimony in the Senate Election Law Committee on SB248 which deals with the same issue—the need for towns to know that their postponed election results are valid. We listened as the voice of a powerful leader, disappointed by the bond issue vote in his own town, swayed the committee to replace the original clear and simple wording of ratification with an ineffective bill in the hopes that the House would find a better solution, given a little more time.

So the ball is now in your court. Election officials received varied advice from disparate “experts” on how to handle the snow emergency on March 14. They made the best decision they felt they could make. Voters voted—maybe the next day, maybe a week or two later. Some voted absentee, even though the forms as printed had March 14 rather than the postponement date. But **they voted and they believed their votes were going to be counted. There can be no stronger deterrent to future voting than to tell people that the votes they cast might not have really mattered.**

The League urges this committee to keep the language about a study so that there can be no question in future about weather emergency protocols for municipal elections. But the more immediate need is two-fold: First, to let towns move forward on any bond issues, land use board amendments and appointment of newly elected officials that voters approved at postponed sessions. Second, to restore voters’ confidence in the validity of their votes. Another election on May 23—which might be viewed as an unfunded mandate—will certainly not reassure voters that their votes matter. It will also delay the work of newly elected board members to go about their business of governing their towns.

The League of Women Voters NH urges the committee to amend SB 108 to include the original election ratification language of SB248 as proposed by the sponsor (see addendum).

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Tentarelli, president League of Women Voters New Hampshire
home phone and email: 603-763-9296 LWV@kenliz.net

Addendum: Text of SB248 as originally proposed:

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Seventeen

AN ACT ratifying elections and meetings postponed due to a weather emergency on March 14, 2017.

Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:

1 Town and School District Meetings and Elections; Ratification. All actions, votes, and proceedings, including but not limited to the receipt and issuance of absentee ballots and the time for official recounts, held at any town election, town meeting, school district election, or school district meeting, that were originally scheduled to take place on March 14, 2017, postponed due to a weather emergency, and held at a later date are hereby legalized, ratified, and confirmed.

2 Town and School District Meetings and Elections; Official Ballot Jurisdictions; Ratification. All actions, votes, and proceedings, including but not limited to the receipt and issuance of absentee ballots and the time for official recounts, held at any session of an annual meeting of a town or school district that has adopted the provisions of RSA 40:13 that were originally scheduled to take place on March 14, 2017, postponed due to a weather emergency, and held at a later date are hereby legalized, ratified, and confirmed.

3 Effective Date. This act shall take effect upon its passage.