



Testimony of Cathy Stewart

Vice President for National Development, Independent Voting

Submitted to the Election Law Committee, New Hampshire House of Representatives

Opposing HB 86

January 22, 2021

Independent Voting thanks the Election Law Committee for the opportunity to testify today in opposition to House Bill 86, an act relative to voter qualifications and registration procedures.

I serve as the Vice President for National Development at Independent Voting, the country's largest organization of independent voters. We are a national strategy, communications and organizing hub working to connect and empower the 40% of Americans who identify as independents.

My comments focus on the provisions of the bill that impact the structure of the primaries and registration provisions.

For decades, New Hampshire has had a model same day voter registration provision and well-designed primary structure that makes it possible for independents to participate by selecting the party ballot they wish to vote in and then reregistering as an independent as they leave the poll. New Hampshire's system balances the interests of the political parties to hold party primaries that are tax payer funded while allowing the electorate to fully exercise their voting rights. The state has consistently been ranked among the top ten states in the country with the highest voter turnout by US News and World Report.

The current primary and voter registration system employed by the state of New Hampshire is one in keeping with the spirit of the state, the live free or die state. It is a system that allows for diverse political views to flourish, in a state known for its independence where, as of August 2020, 38.5% of New Hampshire voters are undeclared. That is more voters than either of the other major parties. These voters view the proposed changes as steps to suppress their voting freedoms and close the primaries.

This leads me to ask a question for the Election Law Committee to consider -- what problem is this bill attempting to address?

This is a moment when our nation is focusing on our democracy and the protection of the cherished norms of the democratic process. Given New Hampshire's unique location on the political terrain as the first in the nation Presidential Primary, and its long practice of having an election system that is in keeping with the independence of the NH electorate, I would urge the Committee to uphold the current system and vote against HB 86.