

From: Judy Andree
To: [Senate Finance Committee](#)
Subject: Senate Bill 186: Automatic Voter Registration Initiative--Support for the Opt-Out version in the original
Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2018 7:59:45 AM



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF ALASKA

P.O. Box 22048, Juneau, AK 99802

April 11, 2018

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

The League of Women Voters works to make certain that all eligible citizens are registered to vote and that they are educated on the issues in a non-partisan way. We support automatic voter registration, and the League of Women Voters of Alaska (LWVAK) fully supports the use of the PFD application to automatically register voters with an opt-out mechanism for the few people who might not want to be registered.

The Brennan Center for Justice reports that eleven states and the District of Columbia have already approved automatic voter registration measures and 19 other states have introduced such measures in 2018. One of the components of the model legislation for Automatic Voter Registration supported by the Brennan Center includes an opt-out selection for those who don't wish to become registered. The League was surprised then to see the changes to SB 186 brought about by the adoption of the Coghill Amendment, requiring an opt-in mechanism for citizens rather than the original opt-out. This change seems to negate the purpose of the law and certainly will reduce the number of registered voters that the original bill might have helped register.

Senator Coghill has been quoted as saying in defense of his amendment that he wants "to make the case that the burden of the willingness to vote still belongs to the voter." The League agrees that citizens have the right to choose whether or not to vote, but that choice must come at election time. The act of voting and the act of registering are different in a very important way. You cannot vote if you are not registered. On the other hand, the registration of someone who does not want to be registered under the original opt-out bill does no harm to that person's right to vote.

After listening to the discussion on April 10th in the Senate Finance Committee hearing on SB 186, the issue of privacy seems to be a major concern for the Senate Finance Committee members, as it well should be. The Division of Elections already has in place a method of keeping certain information private in cases of stalking and abuse concerns. The process of transferring information from the PFD Division to the Division of Elections can certainly be adjusted to handle this. It may be that a small addition to the PFD application can deal with privacy issues as well as the opt-out option. There is no need to change the original intent of the PFD Voter Registration initiative or to make major legislative adjustments which may turn out to be unconstitutional.

Voting is a right guaranteed to all citizens regardless of education level, economic situation, race, religion, and gender, to name a few considerations. The League will work tirelessly to make sure that voters exercise that right and are well educated in the issues at stake in any given election. We will also continue to assist those who need assistance in registering to vote.

The question then becomes this: Do we want all eligible citizens to be registered to vote as efficiently as possible? If we do, we must ignore the “burden of willingness” issue because a true belief in equality in voting does not require a “burden” to be met. This does not mean housekeeping changes shouldn’t be made to protect privacy and increase efficiency. With this in mind, the League of Women Voters of Alaska supports the original opt-out provisions of the Automatic Voter Registration Initiative and opposes the opt-in amendment change to SB 186.

Sincerely,

League of Women Voters of Alaska

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The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

--Sent by
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