

**Testimony in support of LD 260 – RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law**

Greetings Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am the proud Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW ME). NASW ME would like to take this time to offer our support for LD 260. As a social worker, a lifelong advocate for civil rights, and the Executive Director of the NASW ME Chapter, I firmly believe that this amendment is not only a necessary affirmation of our state's values but also a critical safeguard for the future of equity in Maine.

The Inclusive Equal Rights Amendment would ensure that Maine's foundational legal document explicitly guarantees equal rights for all individuals, regardless of actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical or mental disability, ancestry or national origin. By enshrining these rights into our state's constitution, Maine would join the 29 other states that have taken decisive action to protect all individuals from discrimination.

As social workers, we witness firsthand the real-life consequences of inequity—whether in access to healthcare, employment opportunities, housing, or education. We see the systemic barriers that continue to disproportionately impact marginalized communities and the ways in which current legal protections, while essential, do not always go far enough in addressing these disparities. By codifying equal rights into the Maine Constitution, we take a bold step toward ensuring that every resident—no matter their identity—can live with dignity and without fear of discrimination.

This amendment would provide the State of Maine with stronger tools to combat discrimination and civil rights violations that may not yet be fully addressed under existing state law. While Maine has made significant progress in advancing civil rights protections, we cannot assume that statutory protections alone are sufficient. Laws can change. Protections can erode. Court rulings can shift. The constitutional amendment ensures that Maine's commitment to equal rights is not subject to political tides but firmly embedded in our legal foundation.

History has demonstrated that without explicit constitutional protections, progress can be reversed. We need only look at the ongoing national debates around reproductive rights, voting rights, and LGBTQ+ protections to see how quickly legal precedents can be challenged. A constitutional amendment ensures that equal rights remain protected regardless of changes in leadership or shifts in the legislative landscape.

This amendment is more than a legal measure—it is a moral imperative. It signals to all Mainers, present and future, that our state stands unequivocally for fairness, inclusion, and justice. It reaffirms that our government exists to serve and protect all people equitably, not just those who have historically held power. I urge this committee to support the Inclusive Equal Rights Amendment and to stand with those who have fought for generations to make equality a lived reality for all. By passing this amendment, Maine has an opportunity to lead the way in affirming human rights, ensuring that no resident's dignity is left to interpretation, negotiation, or the shifting winds of political change.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



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