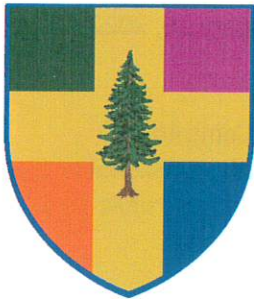


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January 25, 2022

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is John Hennessy and I am the Director of Public Advocacy for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine and I serve as the co-chair of the Maine Council of Churches Public Policy Committee. I am offering our testimony in **support** of LD 1871 – Resolve, Directing the Maine Human Rights Commission To Extend Its Pilot Program To Investigate and Report on Incidents of Harassment Due to Housing Status, Lack of Employment and Other Issues.

People experiencing homelessness describe experiencing discrimination from landlords, employers, and in their daily routines. LD 1871 helps them document those discriminatory acts with the Maine Human Rights Commission to formally lodge discrimination complaints. This bill extends the original Dignity Pilot, a program to document discrimination against people who are unhoused and would extend LD 1294's (129th Legislature) original mandate for an additional two years to conduct a Dignity Pilot program receiving and reporting on how people experiencing homelessness are discriminated against in the state of Maine.

The Episcopal Church and all of the Maine Council of Church denominations directs our congregations to advocate unflaggingly for state governments to close gaps in the safety net which cause millions of Americans to suffer eviction, homelessness, inability to access health care, medical debt, and hunger.

We advocate for adequate nutrition, healthcare, and housing as human rights which should be provided to all residents of this country, and for which eligibility is determined only by the applicants' current financial need, and all eligible people receive the aid for which they qualify.

The Discrimination Based on Homelessness Pilot Project — a Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) program — collects complaints about an array of discrimination that occurs based on an individual's housing status. This project is a result of [Homeless Voices for Justice's](#) (HVJ) advocacy to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are not discriminated against in the state of Maine.

There is an urgent need for a two-year extension for this pilot project because:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge for people navigating both the pandemic and homelessness to file a complaint either online or in paper form.

The original MHRC intake form did not include a space where someone could indicate that the reported discrimination was based on homelessness/housing status.

Thank you for your support of this important legislation.

143 State Street
Portland, Maine
04101

(207) 772-1953
info@episcopalmaine.org
episcopalmaine.org

Mailing Address:
Post Office Box 4036
Portland, Maine
04101-4036