

**Lee Umphrey, President & CEO, Eastern Maine Development Corporation  
Supporting LD 1412  
Before the Maine Committee on Judiciary, Augusta  
April 24, 2023**

Thank you, Madam Chair Senator Anne Carney, House Chair Matt Noonan, and Members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Lee Umphrey, President & CEO of Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) and here in strong support of LD 1412 – A Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law.

EMDC is a community-based, nonprofit organization that fosters public-private relationships and provides programmatic services while leveraging resources that help businesses, communities, and individuals reach long-term goals and prosperity. We are the only economic development organization in the state that provides small business lending, economic and municipal comprehensive planning, and workforce development services in our region and statewide.

Our integrated community-based programs and individualized services accelerate economic and workforce development and success. We also seek to ensure smooth navigation around social barriers including access to affordable childcare, healthcare, housing, and discrimination and equity issues that might impede their success. To that end, ERA is both an economic and equality issue.

Increasingly, EMDC programs have more women in our business and workforce programs. Challenges include balancing family, childcare, and financial planning. Because working women in our state and nationwide are driving economic progress we need to do better in creating policies and workplaces for women to feel equal and valued.

One hundred and three years ago, Maine voted to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment ensuring that the right to vote could not be denied in our nation. Contrary to speculation, Representative Lois Reckitt and Governor Janet Mills was not present during that historic moment but have worked tirelessly for equality since then. The Governor and Lois's work over all these years in Maine will always grow because the next generation, with Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman, and DECD Commissioner Heather Johnson fight every day to protect and promote women in the workplace. In many ways, Commissioner Fortman is following the focus of Newcastle's Frances Perkins, the first woman in a presidential cabinet as Secretary of Labor in protecting economic, workplace safety and equal pay for equal work.

For those who say this endeavor is not needed, I offer another first woman of Maine, Senator Margaret Smith. A Republican, Senator Smith was the first woman elected to both the US House and US Senate. While her declaration of conscience is well known for supporting fundamental rights for all, her advocacy for women in the military was equally profound. In 1948, she saw injustice and inequality and fought for and achieved permanent protection, status, and equality for the Women's Army Corps. Senator Smith did this because it was good public policy and she saw her role as a public servant as being an efficient and honest broker to do what is right.

To that end, I support Lois and her longtime policy partners in proudly, plainly and persistently endorsing the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. At the same time, let's recognize the remarkable women leaders of Maine and renew the commitment we must sustain for fair and lasting prosperity. The [Maine Constitution](#), was created when women had limited rights, so it falls short of protecting its citizens from sex discrimination. To fix that, a constitutional amendment is needed. This is good business for Maine.