

Maine Human Rights Commission

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January 23, 2024

The Honorable Anne Carney, Senate Chair
The Honorable Matt Moonen, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: An Act to Correct outdated References in and Relating to the Maine Human Rights Act – LD 2142

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

The Maine Human Rights Commission (“Commission”) is Maine’s quasi-independent, neutral, apolitical State agency charged with enforcing our state anti-discrimination law, the Maine Human Rights Act, 5 M.R.S. §§ 4551, *et seq.* (“MHRA”). The Commission is statutorily charged with the duties of: investigating, conciliating, and at times litigating protected-class discrimination cases under the MHRA; promulgating rules and regulations to effectuate the Act; and making recommendations for further legislation or executive action concerning infringements on human rights in Maine. 5 M.R.S. § 4566(7), (11). With those duties in mind, the Commission is pleased to provide this testimony in favor of LD 2142, *An Act to Correct Outdated References in and Relating to the Maine Human Rights Act*.

LD 2142 makes three small but important changes to the MHRA. First, with regard to the Commission’s two Major Policy-Influencing positions, it replaces Chief Compliance Officer with Commission Counsel. This is necessary and appropriate, since there has not been a Chief Compliance Officer at the Commission for at least a decade, and Commission Counsel is responsible for drafting all Commission-submitted bills as well as the Commission’s rules and regulations.

Second, the bill replaces several references to protection orders received under Title 19-A, section 4007, which was repealed last legislative session, with the correct reference, Title 19-A, section 4110. The bill also clarifies that the Commission will respect protection from abuse orders received under a substantially similar law in another state or country. Receipt of a permanent order of protection is a protected class in both employment and housing.

Third, the bill replaces a reference to “husband and wife” with “spouses” to clarify that it is not unlawful discrimination to require both parties to a marriage to sign a note or mortgage.

Conclusion

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 2142. The Commission takes seriously its duty to protect the people of Maine from discrimination, and its duty to safeguard the MHRA itself. We greatly appreciate the Committee's attention, and would be pleased to discuss these issues with you at your convenience, including at the work session on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crossman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kit Thomson Crossman, Executive Director