

Testimony from Tobin Williamson of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition in support of:
**LD 2210: An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit and a Civil Rights Review Panel Within
the Office of the Attorney General and Require Ongoing Enhanced Civil Rights Training
for Civil Rights Officers**

Sponsored By: House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross of Cumberland County

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

My name is Tobin Williamson and I live in Westbrook. I am the Manager of Advocacy & Policy with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a network of around 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities across the state. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices and perspectives of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard at the State House in Augusta, in the Halls of Congress in D.C., and in municipalities throughout Maine.

I am writing to you today in support of LD 2210, An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit and a Civil Rights Review Panel Within the Office of the Attorney General and Require Ongoing Enhanced Civil Rights Training for Civil Rights Officers. We are grateful to Speaker Talbot Ross for introducing this bill, which could not be timelier given the concerning rise of hatred in our state.

Indeed, over the past few years, there has been a notable increase¹ in hate crimes and hate speech in the state of Maine. Whether it has been white nationalists rallying in the state's larger cities², physical assaults on immigrants of color³, property being vandalized with racial slurs⁴, using weapons to intimidate interracial families⁵, verbal abuse of Asian-Americans⁶, "Zoom bombing" municipal meetings with antisemitic comments⁷, Islamophobic attacks on businesses⁸, or more, we can no longer ignore this problem. We at the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition stand against hate in all forms and recognize the importance of a dedicated Civil Rights Unit within the Office of the Attorney General.

To quote from the testimony on this bill from my friend James Myall, MIRC advocates for policies that would make "Maine a welcoming place for Americans of all backgrounds, and for immigrants from overseas." We believe this bill would help with those goals. However, we also want to emphasize the intersectionality of our work, acknowledging this legislation would also positively impact all people at risk of civil rights violations based on race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, and more. Moreover, we believe this is an idea that would make our state a better place for everyone.

We are proud to join our allies at the ACLU of Maine, the Permanent Commission, the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and more in supporting this important legislation. We hope you will join us in supporting LD 2210. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

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¹ <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/07/23/hate-groups-are-on-the-march-in-maine/>

² <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/local/lewiston-auburn/neo-nazi-group-marches-through-lewiston-park-maine/97-477d8375-abe8-4839-add2-048344c62f09>

³ <https://wgme.com/news/local/maine-ag-files-civil-rights-complaint-against-lewiston-woman-andrea-ouellette-racial-epithet-hate-crime-black-woman-black-man>

⁴ <https://www.wabi.tv/2021/09/17/two-bangor-teen-girls-charged-with-hate-crime/>

⁵ <https://quoddytides.com/jonesboro-man-faces-charges-for-threatening-interracial-couple.html>

⁶ <https://apnews.com/general-news-27b57c52ea7cd266d647dbac9ffa04d9>

⁷ <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/09/24/weve-been-hacked-maine-public-meetings-struggle-to-corral-hateful-zoom-speakers/>

⁸ <https://www.centralmaine.com/2018/04/11/advocacy-group-suspects-islamophobia-in-attack-on-muslim-business-in-troy/>