

Testimony in support of LD 260 to the Committee On Judiciary

March 4, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Judiciary,

My name is Sarah Johnson and I reside in Sanford and work in Wells. I am writing in support of LD260, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Establish That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law.

I have worked in technical industries for over 40 years. The challenges I have faced are minimal compared to most women in the workforce and have been over for quite a long time. My testimony and support for this bill is based on my evidence based professional life, and the undeniable fact that my success was entirely due to the opportunities made available to me based on my race and zip code at birth.

For decades there were few women working in manufacturing or technical development labs where I worked, and fewer minorities. Discrimination can be overt or subtle, but both are traumatic and have lifelong consequences. Women and minorities were not welcomed or supported in areas of technology for decades. The lack of diversity of the workforce supported gender and racial bias, educational disparities, redlining and every other discriminatory practice that lets ‘some’ in and keeps ‘others’ out, preventing generational and societal advancement. The results are clear for us and demonstrated by childhood poverty rates in Maine that are shameful (<https://maineequaljustice.org/policy-and-solutions/racial-equity/> **approximately 13.5% of white/non Hispanic children in Maine live in poverty, and over 34.8% of children from Maine’s tribes live in poverty, and over 45.6% of children from Maine’s black or African American families live in poverty**).

Sexism and racism are forms of bullying, which is something we teach our children not to do, then do in the workplace. This keeps hard-working, talented and creative people out of the workforce and ensures the same future for their children.

We will never be able to measure the gross negative impact these practices have had on all of us because we will never know what advancements we could have made and issues we could have solved with equality and diversity in the workforce. We will never know what the poverty rates would be today had we ensured equality and protections for all 20, 30, 40 years ago.

What are we so afraid of that we would continue the social self-harm practices of discrimination rather than value, protect, include and embrace all people?

All Mainers should feel secure in their independence and opportunities for participation and advancement on whatever path they choose. Those privileges should not be based on a color, and a zip code.

I hope you will support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson, Sanford Maine