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

Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition (MPAC) is writing to express our strong support of LD 260 to amend the Constitution of Maine to establish that all Maine residents have equal rights under the law. While Maine has made some progress with previously enacted human rights legislation, it is important that the state take this positive step to enshrine equal rights protections in the Constitution on an even more inclusive basis. We support the amendment that would specifically prohibit discrimination by the state and any of its subdivisions based on actual or perceived race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical or mental disability, ancestry, or national origin.

Incarcerated individuals, and those returning to their Maine communities after incarceration, face significant, often overwhelming, hurdles. Just to give one example of a progressive change that would result from amending Maine's Constitution based on LD 260: It would ensure that the Maine Human Rights Commission's mandate would expand to include the critical issue of the discrimination affecting rates and conditions of female incarceration.

We urge the committee and the Maine legislature to bring this very timely issue before Maine voters for adoption. Thank you.