



April 28, 2025

Senator Joe Baldacci, Chair
Representative Suzanne Salisbury, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
Cross Office Building, Room 214
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: LD 1556, *An Act to Provide Compensation to Individuals with Lived Experience Serving on Advisory Boards, Commissions, Councils and Similar Groups.*

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Staci Converse and I am a managing attorney at Disability Rights Maine. DRM is Maine's designated Protection and Advocacy Agency, and our mission is to advance justice and equality by enforcing rights and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1556, *An Act to Provide Compensation to Individuals with Lived Experience Serving on Advisory Boards, Commissions, Councils and Similar Groups.*

This legislation takes a long-overdue step toward equity and respect. People with lived experience—particularly self-advocates with disabilities—are often asked to contribute their time and expertise without pay, even as other professionals at the table are compensated. That's unjust.

I work with self-advocates who regularly serve on state advisory groups. Their insight is vital. But without compensation, participation often comes at a personal cost—lost income and travel expenses that can be prohibitive. This bill removes those barriers by authorizing reimbursement and a modest per diem when funds are available, provided the individual is not already being paid for their service.

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MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Lived experience is expertise. This bill helps Maine recognize that reality and ensures our policy-making spaces are more inclusive and equitable.

For the foregoing reasons, DRM supports LD 1556, and respectfully requests that this Committee vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Staci K. Converse", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Staci K. Converse
Managing Attorne