

**Testimony of Katie Rutherford**  
**In Opposition to LD 1432 – *An Act to Remove Consideration of Gender Identity***  
***from the Maine Human Rights Act***  
**Committee on Judiciary**  
**May 8, 2025**

Chair Carney, Chair Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Katie Rutherford, and I am the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center, a community-based nonprofit committed to advancing health equity and human dignity. We provide HIV case management, housing support, free HIV testing, and advocacy for some of the most marginalized members of our community—many of whom are LGBTQ+, low-income, and living with or at risk for HIV.

I am writing today to voice our strong opposition to LD 1432 and any attempt to remove "gender identity" from the Maine Human Rights Act.

For decades, Maine has stood as a state that recognizes that every person—regardless of gender identity—deserves the right to live free from discrimination in housing, employment, public accommodations, education, and access to healthcare. Rolling back these protections would be a dangerous and harmful step backward.

Our clients include transgender Mainers, people who already face disproportionately high rates of housing insecurity, job discrimination, and barriers to healthcare. These structural inequities are compounded by stigma, violence, and poverty. The protections guaranteed under the Maine Human Rights Act are not symbolic—they are essential. They are the safety net for someone who is turned away from housing because of who they are. They are the legal ground to stand on when someone is denied care. They are a message that in Maine, trans people matter.

Let's be clear: removing "gender identity" from the Maine Human Rights Act would not protect anyone. It would only increase harm. It would deny transgender people the basic human rights that others take for granted and would place them at greater risk for the very conditions we work every day to prevent—unstable housing, poor health outcomes, and violence.

As an organization rooted in public health, we know that discrimination is a public health issue. When people are denied their rights, their mental health suffers. Their physical health suffers. Entire communities suffer.

We urge you in the strongest terms to reject any proposal that strips away the recognition and protection of gender identity from our civil rights law. Maine must continue to be a place where dignity, equality, and justice are not negotiable—where no one is left behind.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your commitment to protecting all Mainers.