



Maine Human Rights Commission

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April 24, 2023

The Honorable Anne Carney, Senate Chair
The Honorable Matt Moonen, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law - LD 1412

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

The Maine Human Rights Commission ("Commission") is Maine's quasi-independent, neutral, apolitical State agency charged with enforcing our state anti-discrimination law, the Maine Human Rights Act, 5 M.R.S. §§ 4551, *et seq.* ("MHRA"). The Commission is statutorily charged with the duties of: investigating, conciliating, and at times litigating protected-class discrimination cases under the MHRA; promulgating rules and regulations to effectuate the Act; and making recommendations for further legislation or executive action concerning infringements on human rights in Maine. 5 M.R.S. § 4566(7), (11). With those duties in mind, the Commission is pleased to provide this testimony in favor of LD 1412, *RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law*.

LD 1412 goes to the heart of our agency's mission. The MHRA prohibits discrimination on the bases outlined in LD 1412 in employment, housing, places of public accommodation, education, and extension of credit, and our agency's half-century enforcing the law has given us a fairly clear view of just how stubbornly discrimination and inequality persist in Mainers' lives. Over the last five years, the Commission has found reasonable grounds to believe that discrimination has occurred in about 20% of the cases that are heard by the Commissioners, although the overall rate of reasonable-grounds cases for *all complaints filed per year* hovers around 5%. **The Commission is forced to conclude that discrimination remains all too frequent in our state's employment, housing, public spaces, education, and extension of credit, despite the MHRA's longstanding prohibition on it in these areas of jurisdiction.**

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1412. The Commission would be pleased to discuss these issues with you at your convenience, including at the work session on this matter.

Sincerely,

Amy M. Sneirson, Executive Director

Cc: Commissioners