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TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

**LD 254 – Ought to Pass as Amended**

**An Act to Update the Sex Education and Consent Curriculum**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

January 9, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, good afternoon. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we support LD 254, as amended, to update funding for Maine’s comprehensive sexual education programming.

Comprehensive sex education provides young people with the knowledge and skills they need to develop healthy relationships based on consent and respect, which reduces both victimization from and perpetration of intimate partner violence. It has also been proven to reduce rates of adolescent sexual activity and, when teens do become sexually active, to lead to more consistent condom use and fewer risky sexual behaviors. All of this leads to reduced disease transmission and teen pregnancy rates.<sup>1</sup> Comprehensive education about sex and sexuality also promotes LGBTQIA-inclusive school communities, reducing bullying and harassment.

As young people grow into adulthood, we should give them the tools and knowledge they need to make the best decisions they can for themselves and their bodies. Updating funding to ensure educators can reach all Maine students is an important step in this process. We urge you to support LD 254.

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<sup>1</sup> *Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, Committee Opinion No. 678, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Nov. 2016, available at <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2016/11/comprehensive-sexuality-education>