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## Maine Equal Justice

### People Policy Solutions

#### **MEJ Testimony in Support of 1432, *An Act to Amend the Law Governing Racial Impact Statements***

February 6, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State & Local Government Committee. My name is Dina Malual, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate with Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are pleased to testify in support of LD 1432.

LD 1432 seeks to prevent discriminative racial and ethnic policy practices that are deeply rooted in our systems by providing lawmakers with relevant demographic data for bills before their committees. This bill builds additional staff capacity for a process to collect relevant demographic information to help inform policy decisions. Existing data tells us that there are significant racial and ethnic disparities throughout different systems: health care, education, criminal justice, income, housing, employment, and more. For example, Covid-19 highlighted health disparities in Maine. Despite making up 1.4 percent of the population in 2020, Black Mainers accounted for 24 percent of all Covid-19 cases.<sup>1</sup> Although the state continues to take steps to address systemic and structural racism, lawmakers need to understand the populations that are impacted by a proposed policy to determine if it will improve or increase disparities for people in certain demographics.

While proposed policies may not explicitly include race, there is still a possibility that they can perpetuate racial disparities. Improving and effectively using data leads to better policy decisions. Lawmakers are at the forefront of law creation and uniquely positioned to prevent racist laws. We cannot undo the effects of structural racism without targeting racial disparities in our current law and ensure that racial and ethnic groups in our state have been adequately considered in our policy decisions.

At Maine Equal Justice we are deeply committed to supporting policy change that is data-driven, equitable and inclusive. LD 1432 would help ensure lawmakers have the data they need to advance racial equity and create long-lasting change. This is another step the legislature can take to remedy years of racial inequity. For these reasons, we urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 1432.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www1.maine.gov/dhhs/blog/how-dhhs-addressing-health-disparities-exposed-covid-19-2020-06-22>