

Testimony in Support of LD 2210, "An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit and a Civil Rights Review Panel Within the Office of the Attorney General and Require Ongoing Enhanced Civil Rights Training for Civil Rights Officers "

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Good Afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is James Myall; I'm an Economic Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and I'm here to testify in support of LD 2210, "An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit and a Civil Rights Review Panel Within the Office of the Attorney General and Require Ongoing Enhanced Civil Rights Training for Civil Rights Officers." MECEP supports LD 2210 because ensuring that Maine is a welcoming place that feels safe for everyone is not just a moral imperative, but an economic advantage.

As in the rest of the country, women, people of color, and other vulnerable groups face social and systemic barriers which reduce their economic security and their ability to thrive. When women are paid 78 percent of a man's salary,¹ or Black Mainers are twice as likely to be unemployed as white Mainers,² it means that there are hundreds of thousands of Mainers who are not able to fulfill their full economic potential. This holds back our overall economy and means less prosperity for all of us.

These disparities can be caused by a variety of factors. Some have deep roots in our history, or are embedded in our laws in ways that require proactive action from legislators to root out and change. But there are also relatively simple cases of outright discrimination and bias that are clearly illegal, but which we do not have the full capacity to address. We must increase our capacity at a variety of levels, but especially to address the most egregious cases of hate crimes. LD 2210 would improve this enforcement capacity for the most serious cases which rise to the level of civil rights violations.

We know that Maine needs to continue expanding its population and workforce if it wants to keep growing its economy and ensure a prosperous future for all residents. Part of this has to be making Maine a welcoming place for Americans of all backgrounds, and for immigrants from overseas.³ Currently, however, white non-Hispanic Americans are six times as likely to move to Maine as Black Americans, and seven times as likely as Latino

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Americans. What's more, Mainers of Color are more likely to leave the state than white Americans. The scale of that imbalance amounts to 15,000 fewer working-age Mainers in the state each year.⁴ We need to be working to fix that, and enforcing civil rights legislation more rigorously is one way to do so. At least some research corroborates the idea that African-Americans are less likely to move to states with high rates of hate crimes.⁵

Making Maine a more just and welcoming place for everyone will require sustained work on your part as legislators, but LD 2210 would be an important step in the right direction, and would send a signal that Maine takes hate crimes seriously, and ensures equal protection for all its residents.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2210. Thank you, and I'm happy to take any questions.

Notes

¹ US Census Bureau, American Community Survey data, 2022. Median earnings for men and women in civilian occupations aged 16 or older. ACS table S2411 retrieved from data.census.gov

² James Myall, "State of Working Maine 2020," *Maine Center for Economic Policy*, Nov 9, 2020. <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/report-state-of-working-maine-2020/>

³ James Myall, "State of Working Maine 2023," *Maine Center for Economic Policy*, Nov 20, 2023. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/State-of-Working-Maine-2023-Report.pdf>

⁴ MECEP analysis of US Census Bureau, American Community Survey microdata, 2012-2021, via the Integrated Public Use Microdata System (IPUMS).

⁵ Ruby Henry, "Does Racism Affect a Migrant's Choice of Destination? A Case Study of African Americans, 1995-2000." *IZA Discussion Paper No. 4349*. Aug 18, 2009 <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1455511>