

Shannon L. Carr
Bristol, Maine
March 4, 2025

LD 260: Resolution: Proposing an Amendment to the
Constitution of Maine to Establish That All Maine Residents
Have Equal Protection Under the Law

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary, I'm grateful for the opportunity to address the committee this afternoon.

My name is Shannon Carr, I live in Bristol. I'm a women's health physician testifying on behalf of the Maine Section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). We represent practicing and retired ob-gyns across the state who are committed to providing patient-centered, evidence-based reproductive healthcare. We are testifying in support of LD 260.

ACOG has long recognized the profound interplay of human and civil rights and the health of individuals, as well as the health of our society. It is very well established that societal and structural determinants of health are contributory to health inequities. Structural inequities are the macro-scaffolding upon which societies foster and advance discriminatory policies and practices by way of, for one, our legal frameworks; laws that impact access to safe and affordable housing, ability to make a living wage, and that have bearing on food insecurity, etc. All of these legal forces are distilled into the health and well-being of our citizens.

We know that populations of people who are marginalized, who must struggle and fight to get ahead, much less thrive, in life, suffer adverse health outcomes; they don't have the wind at their backs. Who are these folks? LGBTQI+ communities, folks of color, women. Why do we need an Inclusive ERA? Because these communities are still fighting, are still struggling, and are still suffering from trauma and violence because of legal vulnerabilities. Research shows us again and again that these communities continue to bear adverse health outcomes, and these harms are escalating in our current times. It is evident we're not doing enough to provide the legal instruments to mitigate these harms.

With regards to full-spectrum sexual and reproductive healthcare, there exists an ample and growing body of research which illustrates that restrictive reproductive healthcare laws result in poor maternal and infant outcomes. According to one study, women in more restrictive states experienced a 13%-15% increased odds of preterm birth, and a 6%-9% increased odds of low birth weight compared with women in states with the strongest protections. Another study showed that by 2017, maternal mortality in restrictive states was almost twice that of protective states. While Maine's Inclusive ERA does not explicitly address reproductive healthcare, it provides a framework upon which we can build health equity for all Maine families.

It is vital that all Maine citizens have equal protection under the law, to have the wind at their backs on the path to healthier lives. LD 260 is a critical step toward realizing this vision for Mainers. Thank you for the opportunity to share ACOG's perspective with the Committee and I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 260 and allow the people to speak on equal protection under the law for all Mainers.