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Testimony of Rep. Holly T. Sargent introducing
LD 260, Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine
Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary. I am Holly Sargent and I represent District 147, which is two-thirds of the town of York.

I am proud to stand before you as the Sponsor of LD 260, a Resolution Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law. Two years ago, I stood in this room and advocated for an identical bill. Then, I stood beside the irrepressible, indefatigable Honorable Lois Galgay Reckitt. She had been in the trenches working for the Equal Rights of women in Maine and across America for decades. She had been present in January of 1974, when Maine became the 31st state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. Democrats and Republicans in this building had joined together for the necessary two-thirds vote. The quest for the Federal ERA continues and the nearly 50-year struggle to add a version of the ERA to the Maine Constitution marches before you today. Why? Because it matters!

America is a nation of laws. Our founding documents spell out our ideals, our very essence and our aspirations. The Declaration of Independence announced our quest for equality and opportunity, our Pledge of Allegiance demands liberty and justice for ALL. Our Constitution began with a narrow vision of to whom equal rights were given, but our National and State

Constitutions are living, evolving and expanding pronouncements of what Americans believe. They can enshrine the best of who we want to be.

LD 260, the ERA Amendment here proposed, sets Maine as a beacon for all to see. It proudly affirms the protections of the Maine Human Rights Act and imbeds them in our Constitution. In times of political change, diverse opinions and shifting priorities, making certain that the fundamental rights of **all Mainers- yes, all Mainers**, are protected is more important than ever.

This battle – which began in 1848 in Seneca Falls – is not yet entirely won. Along the 177 years, other groups that have known discrimination have joined the fight. You will hear from some of them today. They are essential parts of ALL. We are each of us part of the ALL.

Resolute, undaunted, tenacious and strong. Generations have gone before, and generations will come after, seeking the full recognition and celebration of human equality. America is the place where this can ultimately be achieved, and Maine can help lead the way. **Dirigo!**

We are proud to do our part and trust the Maine people to decide.