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Testimony of Rep. Dan Ankeles in opposition to
LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When
Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Dan Ankeles, and I represent House District 100, a central slice of Brunswick. I'm here to speak in opposition to **LD 1351, An Act to Require Antisemitism to Be Considered as Motivation When Determining a Violation of a Criminal or Civil Law.**

This testimony is not meant with any ill will toward the sponsor, a kind and positively-regarded colleague who surely means well. If my words come off as harsh, it's because I want to provide this Legislature with enough institutional knowledge to prevent this situation from ever repeating itself.

Because lawmakers who are not co-sponsors testify last, you're probably no longer surprised to see members of the Jewish community testifying in opposition to a measure that, on its face, sets out to punish anti-Semitism. You've probably gleaned by now that this opposition is not some bizarre act of leftist-inspired self-hatred, but rather an impassioned defense of our voice as a community, our identity as a people and our independence from the undue influence of non-Jewish groups outside our community.

That last one is a biggie. These days, lots of people presume to speak for us or to tell us what is in our best interest. Case in point: This year the Maine Legislature has a sizable Jewish caucus. At no point in the development and submission of this bill were any of the eight of us asked if we thought this was a good idea. At no point did anyone say to themselves, hey, if this is a good idea, maybe Jewish lawmakers should be the ones to run point on a bill like this and help it evolve into something meaningful that truly shows an understanding of the long and complicated history of anti-Semitism.

I want to respect your time and the time of members of the public who came here to testify on this bill and on other bills. That's why I won't take you down the rabbit hole about how anti-Semitism is both its own thing and a form of racism and bigotry fully equal to everything else already accepted into the definitions of those words. I won't go into how some on the far left try to downgrade the severity of anti-Semitism relative to other forms of bigotry or how some on the

right weaponize anti-Semitism to suppress legitimate foreign policy discourse in academic settings and to marginalize progressives, people of color and our brothers and sisters in the Muslim community.

While we are not a monolithic people and don't often agree, it's clear that the act of taking away our ability to have dominion over what is and isn't anti-Semitism is itself an insidiously anti-Semitic act. Our voice belongs to us and us alone. Please consider that before changing laws that directly affect us.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to improve Maine's laws with this particular legislative vehicle has been lost. I hope this is a clear lesson to the rest of the Legislature that if you want to make policy about us, you sit down with us first and be humble enough to learn from us. With both this bill and a different bill from a fellow Democrat, that did not happen, so I will be opposing both to the best of my ability. With that, I urge the committee to provide a unanimous "Ought Not to Pass" report and spare the rest of our colleagues on both sides of aisle from a painful and emotionally draining floor debate.

Thank you for your understanding with respect to such an awkward situation.