



Maine Women's Lobby

May 7, 2025

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, and seeks to create policies which allow all Mainers to live free from gender-based discrimination and violence.

That is why we oppose all bills presented today which would roll back our progress in creating the Maine Human Rights Act as a tool to protect Mainers from harassment and discrimination based on their gender identity: LD 1337 and LD 1432.

Our work to expand gender equity is rooted in the idea that harmful norms around gender identity and presentation are used to marginalize, compartmentalize, and sideline members of our community. Expectations about gender identity and presentation are used to control our lives and choices, to require us to be the 'right' kind of woman – not too fat, too thin, too bold, too quiet, too sexual, too frigid.

Just yesterday I did an interview with a middle schooler in Camden, and she asked me what I thought 8th graders should know about discrimination. I said that I thought middle schoolers probably knew more than they thought about gender-based discrimination - had she ever noticed a difference in school dress codes? Her face lit up, and she spent the next ten minutes detailing what she and her friends had noticed about dress codes, and the way their bodies were highly monitored and judged.

That monitoring lasts a lifetime: just yesterday a woman was confronted in a Boston hotel bathroom by a security guard demanding that she 'prove her gender'¹. She was a woman, using a women's bathroom, but had been judged insufficiently womanly.

This is the heart of why the Maine Human Rights Act protects gender identity. It is, indeed, about protecting trans people - because they deserve that right. But more broadly, it is about protecting each of our right to live authentically without being inspected for 'authenticity' in a hotel bathroom.

The monitoring of our bodies is connected with the regular threat or reality of violence. For women who don't comply – and even those who do – there is the shadow of sexual harassment, sexual violence, intimate partner abuse. Every woman has experienced these, or their close family and friends have. This is why shelters and crisis supports are such a

¹ CBS News. May 7, 2025. Woman says security guard at Liberty Hotel in Boston confronted her in bathroom, asked to prove gender. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/women-boston-liberty-hotel-bathroom-gender/>



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critical need for so many women in Maine - and why LD 1337 is so deeply harmful to all survivors of domestic violence.

Gender-based norms and expectations work this same harm on trans women. People want to constantly debate what they should wear, how they should look, what games they can play and with whom – and in this case, whether they deserve safe, supportive shelter when they are in crisis. Gender policing is even more powerful with trans people than cis women – and so is gender-based violence. As you will hear today, **trans women and girls experience sexual violence, harassment, and murder at higher rates than nearly any other demographic**, as well as higher rates of homelessness, poverty, unemployment, and suicide. The statistical reality of living as a trans person in our culture is all the evidence you need to know that trans women are not simply 'men in women's clothing'. Forcing trans women to use male facilities, when men are the primary perpetrators of violence against trans women, makes no one safer.

These bills seek to alter the Maine Human Rights Act to allow private spaces to not comply with its spirit, giving them license to discriminate against those in need. Gender equity is about reimagining a world where women experience equity and respect in all their identities; and where they live with safety, respect, and consent. We are no closer to equity and safety by undoing years of civil rights progress in our state.

Right now, not everyone in Maine who needs safe housing can access it. Mainers are living without homes. Mainers in crisis are turned away from domestic violence shelters or on waiting lists. Mainers are lining up to get a bed in shelters, recovery centers, and more. And for women who don't find that bed, or have insecure housing, the rates of sexual violence and trauma on the streets are staggering. This conversation needs to be about making sure everyone is free from discrimination and safely housed - not about setting standards about the 'right kind of women' to keep some people out.

We are proud to stand up today with our allies to support a vision of gender equity that opens doors, instead of closing them.

We hope you will vote 'ought not to pass' on these bills.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org