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Testimony in Support of LD 590, "An Act Regarding the Inclusion of Racial and Other Demographic Data from State Agencies in the Legislative Process"

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January 21, 2026

Good morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Karin Leuthy, and I'm the Community Engagement Manager at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I'm here to testify in support of LD 590, "An Act Regarding the Inclusion of Racial and Other Demographic Data from State Agencies in the Legislative Process," because MECEP knows good data is the foundation of good policy making.

We all know how powerful legislation can be in impacting Mainers' lives. LD 590 would give legislators, advocates and members of the public access to more information on exactly which people would be most affected by bills under consideration, especially vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

At MECEP, we believe that all Mainers deserve a fair chance at economic success. But right now, some Mainers face extra barriers to achieving prosperity. Some of those obstacles were created by prior policy decisions, and can only be undone through conscious effort in the legislature.

LD 590 allows the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis to look at a wide range of demographic data, and while Mainers of Color face some of the biggest and longest-standing hurdles in our economy, we know that other groups face their own burdens which can be worsened or alleviated through policy choices. Women, older Mainers, Mainers living in rural areas, and Mainers with disabilities all deserve attention in the policymaking process.

Finally, I want to note that LD 590 fills a need that can't be met elsewhere. While groups like MECEP can provide legislators with some data on the impacts of bills on particular groups, we're limited by what's available in public datasets. These don't always have the level of detail we'd like, and when they are based on national surveys, they sometimes don't produce reliable estimates at the state level for small demographic groups. LD 590 will allow OPLA to request administrative data from state agencies which can give us a more detailed and precise picture than survey data.

LD 590 will allow you to make more informed decisions with and build an economy that works for all Mainers. I urge you to vote "ought to pass."

Thank you for your time. I'll be happy to answer any questions.