

TESTIMONY OF MEAGAN SWAY, ESQ.

Ought to Pass - LD 988

**Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Conduct an Accessibility Study of All Maine State Parks and Historic Sites and to Develop a Plan to Remove Access Barriers**

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

March 20, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, greetings. My name is Meagan Sway, and I am the Policy Director at the ACLU of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil rights and civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, we urge you to support LD 988 because it would protect the civil rights of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have the lowest incomes, lowest employment rates, and lowest rates of educational access of any minority in America. According to the U.S. CDC, up to 1 in 4 adults in the United States have some sort of disability, and about one in ten have a mobility disability with serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.<sup>1</sup> Too often, people with disabilities have been treated as second class citizens, shunned and segregated by physical barriers and social stereotypes. They have been discriminated against in employment, schools, and housing, robbed of personal autonomy, and too often, hidden away and forgotten by the larger society.

It is illegal for state parks to discriminate on the basis of a disability. *See generally* Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101(b)(1) (enacted “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.”); § 12131 (prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities by “public entities”). Maine has already done good work to make its parks more accessible, including by

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Impacts All of Us, Disability and Health Promotion, U.S. CDC, Jan 5, 2023, *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/infographic-disability-impacts-all.html#:~:text=Up%20to%201%20in%204,have%20some%20type%20of%20disability.>

publishing the accessibility ratings of all its parks and historic sites.<sup>2</sup> This bill would ensure that we discover, and address, any room for growth. We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.

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<sup>2</sup> Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands: Access for the Disabled, *available at* [https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/visitor\\_accessibility/access\\_guide.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/parks/visitor_accessibility/access_guide.pdf)