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LD 51

Religious and philosophical discrimination against Maine families has been made acceptable with the passing of LD 798 in 2019. Because of my family's religious beliefs, my child is unable to attend public or private school in Maine and therefore is unable to experience the positive impact that public or private school can have on a developing child within a community.

Participating in school is much more than an education - it's developing friendships with peers and relationships with school faculty. Its collective and personal development through socialization with classmates of diverse backgrounds and traditions. It's the opportunity to be influenced and inspired by classmates and to influence and inspire in return. Children participate in school sports, clubs and other afterschool and extracurricular activities where their families are present to cheer on their children and grandchildren. Communities are largely built through these school-related experiences but religious and philosophical discrimination has divided Maine by depriving Maine families of their ability to fully participate in their communities.

The Maine Human Rights Act ("MHRA") is Maine's anti-discrimination law. It prohibits discrimination on the basis of protected class in employment, housing, places of public accommodation, education, and extension of credit. Protected classes include: race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation (which includes gender identity and expression), physical or mental disability, religion, age, and other categories in certain contexts. The passing of LD798 directly violated the MHRA by discriminating against children and their families based on their religious beliefs and their CIVIL RIGHT to a free public education.

Maine is better than this. As one of the most progressive and accepting states in terms of race, ethnicity, cultures, customs and traditions - why are we directly violating the MHRA and allowing this form of religious and philosophical discrimination? We must eliminate this discrimination and be accepting of others no matter what their beliefs are. My child and every Maine child deserves to go to school and participate in every aspect of his or her community without discriminatory conditions. I urge the members of this committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD51 in respect for all of Maine's families and for the sake of Maine's communities.