

Erica Swenson
Minot, Maine
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee Judiciary, thank you for reading my written testimony. My name is Erica Swenson. I am a resident of Minot, a 25-year veteran teacher, and a mother of two young daughters. I am writing today in support of LD 260.

The Maine Inclusive Equal Rights Amendment would go beyond the Maine Human Rights Act and help Maine join 29 other US states in enshrining protections for all citizens in our state constitution. I want my daughters and my many students to continue to be safe in our state, no matter their race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, physical or mental disability, ancestry, or national origin.

I was born and raised in Maine, and throughout my lifetime, I have seen a lot of excellent changes in our state. For instance, as a high school teenager, I clearly remember two horrific instances of violent bullying of LGBTQ+ teens in my school, and yet, as a young adult in 2012, I got to help vote to legalize same-sex marriage in our state. I experienced life in Maine in the 1980s, when, according to our Census data, our state was 98% white. Then, I saw over the years how Mainers in my newly adopted community of Lewiston and Auburn eventually came to embrace an influx of refugees from Somalia and other African and Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, as a lifelong teacher, I have grown as a person and educator by interacting with children and families of all different abilities, cultures, races, socioeconomic classes, and more. I have benefitted first-hand from growing up and working in an inclusive environment, and I want the same opportunity for everyone in our state.

I am proud of all the gains our state has made since my childhood, and I want us to do everything in our power to preserve and improve upon this growth for my children and future Mainers. That means voting in support of LD 260. At a time when many Americans may feel the instability of our federal government, Maine can continue to be a bastion of equality and tolerance. According to our Maine.gov site, since 2023, more people have moved to Maine than left the state – let's keep it that way.

Thank you for this chance to share my experience with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD260. Thank you!