



February 14, 2022

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government,

On behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby, as well as our partners MaineTransNet, GLAD, and Equality Maine, we write today **in support LD 1610, An Act To Promote Equity in Policy Making by Enhancing the State's Ability To Collect, Analyze and Apply Data**. We thank Representative Talbot Ross for sponsoring this bill.

One of the challenges of a state that is significantly white is the limited access to disaggregated data (data broken out by subpopulations). In some instances, data is presented in the aggregate – without breakdowns for subpopulation – in order to protect the privacy and identity of people who may be part of very small subpopulations. This is especially true when the data is related to sensitive topics such as experiences or perpetration of crime or mental health needs. However, there are many places where data simply hasn't been collected or presented in a disaggregated form because it is not the habit to do so, and doing so requires an investment in technology, updated surveying practices, and data analysis.

**Presenting data in the aggregate can sometimes serve to obscure the real impact of an issue – making the data itself a type of misinformation.** If ten people are surveyed for a disease, and five of them have it, that means about half the population has been impacted. But if all five of those impacted live north of Bangor, and all five of the people not impacted live south of it, there may be a very different story to tell when we disaggregate the data by region.

LD 1610 seeks to correct this flaw in our system by setting up standards for how data is collected, stored, and accessed, and by creating principles to guide this program and provide appropriate and ongoing oversight.

**We would like to make one suggestion as this work moves forward: As organizations which represent people who experience not only racism, but also the effects of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, we see the critical value of gathering data on race and ethnicity, but also gender identity and LGBTQ+ status.** More nuanced data sets related to gender identify - not only male and female sex, but nonbinary and transgender status - allow us to better understand the ways that racism, sexism, and homophobia and transphobia work together to create harms. For instance, when we look at data

sets related to sexual violence, we would see in Maine that 20 percent of people experiences rape or attempted rape in their lifetime. When we disaggregate by gender, we see that number for women grows to to over 37 percent.<sup>1</sup> For trans people, that number climbs to 50 percent.<sup>2</sup> When we add race, we see that for trans people who are multiracial, it grows to 59 percent, and 65 percent for trans people who are Native.<sup>3</sup>

There continue to be places across Maine population-level surveys that do not even share data by gender, and we know that collecting LGBTQ+ status is so essential to public health data sets that it is now a part of the national census. **We want to ensure that we design and build data systems that account for the many ways that racism, sexism, and transphobia affects the lives of Mainers.**

When we don't know the scope of the problems we are trying to solve - and who is really being affected by them - our solutions will always come short of where we would like to be. LD 1610 is an opportunity to rethink the kinds of information we gather, and how to ensure that our data is truly a tool to transform systems and improve lives. **We hope to see this bill move forward, and hope that our state systems continue to find ways to ensure that all of our community members count and are counted.**

We're happy to answer any questions you may have, and hope that you will support LD 1610.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby,

*And*

Maine TransNet &  
EqualityMaine &  
GLAD

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<sup>1</sup>Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2015). Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine.

<sup>2</sup> Stotzer, R. (2009). Violence against transgender people: A review of United States data. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 14, 170-179.

<sup>3</sup> James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. Retrieved from the National Center for Transgender Equality: <https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/USTS-Full-Report-FINAL.PDF>