

Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
In **OPPOSITION** to

LD 1238 An Act to Protect Women's Single-Sex Shelters

May 6, 2021

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and Members of the Committee:

My name is the Rev. Alyssa Lodewick, and I am the president of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven member-denominations who represent 437 local churches with 55,000 parishioners across the state. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in opposition to LD 1238**.

As people of faith, united in our belief that every human being is a child of God, created in the image of God and beloved by God, we promote the full humanity and dignity of every person. We call for the full civil, political, and economic rights of people of all races, creeds, gender expressions, and sexual orientations.

In scripture, Gods calls people of faith to care for one another – to feed the hungry, to quench others' thirst, to welcome strangers, to provide clothes for those with none, to care for the sick, and to visit individuals in prison ([Matthew 25:35-36](#)). Because the Council's member denominations and churches take this Holy mandate seriously, we support the United Nations' declaration that adequate housing and shelter is a human right ([UN Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25](#)).

Our faith traditions urge us to protect the health and well-being of people of all races, religions, disability statuses, sexual orientations, gender expressions, and gender identities – including cisgender individuals (i.e., people whose gender expressions and identities align with the gender assigned at birth), transgender individuals (i.e., people whose gender identities and/or expressions are not aligned with gender assigned at birth), and genderqueer and/or gender nonconforming individuals (i.e., people whose gender identities and/or expressions do not align with gender assigned at birth; these individuals may or may not identify as transgender.)

We believe that the Holy One desires all people to experience safety and well-being. Thus, it is our moral conviction that **access to shelter should never depend upon core elements of personal identity. All human beings are Children of God, and all human beings deserve access to safe accommodations.** And yet we know that this sadly is not currently the case. Data gathered by the National Alliance to End Homelessness indicate that “transgender people are more likely to be unsheltered than their cisgender peers, and those who are unsheltered have considerably more health and safety challenges than those who are sheltered” ([“Transgender Homeless Adults & Unsheltered Homelessness: What the Data Tell Us,” July 24, 2020](#)).

We see LD 1238 as problematic because it removes “privately-owned and operated facilities that provide emergency shelter to women or temporary housing for women” from the list of “places of public accommodation” that must adhere to Maine Human Rights Act non-discrimination clauses. **LD 1238 thus opens the door to discrimination** based not only upon sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression, but also upon race, religion, and disability status.

We are concerned that LD 1238 will permit single-sex homeless shelters for women to refuse service and shelter to individuals based upon shelter employees' subjective judgments regarding a potential client's race, disability status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This is especially troubling given the fact that many Maine municipalities and regions lack multiple shelters and sufficient shelter beds. In these locales, an individual turned away from one shelter due to discrimination would most likely not be able to access an alternative safe-shelter location.

Ultimately, LD 1238 – which purports to “protect” women’s shelters – could end up harming (and certainly not “protecting”) the very women those shelters publicly claim to desire to serve. While LD 1238 explicitly states a desire to protect *organizations*, we believe that it would end up harming the *individuals* who seek access those organizations’ services. Thus, we argue that LD 1238 is mis-aligned with moral, ethical, and religious mandates to care for society’s most vulnerable individuals.

As people of faith, we are impelled by the example of Jesus to treat all persons with love and dignity – and to especially care for those who are marginalized by society. The Maine Council of Churches thus stands opposed to this bill and asks you to vote **OUGHT NOT TO PASS** on LD 1238.

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