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February 25, 2015  
Re: Testimony on LD 197

BOARD

Meredith Hunt, *President*

Barbara A. Wood, *Vice President*  
EqualityMaine Foundation

Shawn LaGrega, *Vice President*  
EqualityMaine

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Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee  
Senator Scott W. Cyrway, Chair  
Representative Louis J. Luchini Chair  
Room 437, State House  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Chairs & Members of the Committee:

Below is the copy of my verbal testimony.

Hello. I am Elise Johansen, Executive Director of EqualityMaine and I appear before you today to testify in opposition to LD 197. EqualityMaine works to secure full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Maine through political action, community organizing, education, and collaboration and has over 70,000 members in Maine.

EqualityMaine has long been supportive of Maine's voter laws – which provide a myriad of flexible options to ensure Mainers can exercise their right to vote. While I want to focus my testimony on transgender Mainers – I'd like to begin with a personal story about why it's important that our voting laws not put unnecessary barriers in front of Maine citizens.

As an Executive Director of a statewide organization, it would be easy to assume that someone like me - who runs a foundation, a PAC, and a C4 - would be able to navigate our voter laws relatively easily. Well – it's just not as easy as it seems.

In 2013, when my wife and I moved to Maine, a birth certificate was required for my wife to obtain a driver license as she does not have a passport. Obtaining an original of her birth certificate was so complicated that we actually went to Danbury, NC clerk's office to obtain certified copies of her birth certificate. Luckily we had the time and resources to do this.

In June 2014, we were in the midst of moving into our new home and had not yet had a chance to update our address and change our polling location. Having moved from Florida (where voting laws are very restrictive), I did not know at the time that Maine allows residents to make such changes on election day – so in

the midst of the primary day busyness at our organization – I did not vote.

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I tell you this simply to illustrate that it is often difficult to understand and navigate our voting laws – even when we have laws designed to ease the process for voters – and even when the person doing the navigating is a relatively sophisticated consumer. Adding the requirement that voters possess and show a voter ID unnecessarily complicates the process for no tangible benefit.

Putting my personal story aside - EqualityMaine is also particularly concerned about the harm a Voter ID requirement would cause great harm to our transgender friends and family members.

A transgender person is someone who grows up knowing that their body doesn't match who they know they are on the inside, and so they transition and live as the gender they have always known themselves to be.

This bill would prove dangerous and harmful to transgender Mainers in many ways.

1. A transgender person's ID may not list their name or gender correctly, or may not have a photo that reflects their current gender expression. None of these things makes a person's ID invalid or insufficient to establish voter eligibility. However, because of ignorance and bias regarding transgender people, or a misunderstanding of the law, poll workers may believe that a person's ID is invalid or suspicious and try to prevent them from voting.

2. Even where voters have consistent and up to-date name and gender information on their ID, we expect many poll workers to challenge transgender people about the accuracy of their ID, often based on their appearance.

3. While most people take having a photo ID for granted, many people with low incomes, limited access to transportation, and other resource limitations do not have them, and obtaining required ID can be a significant hurdle. Because of high rates of poverty, unemployment and discrimination facing transgender people as well as the fear of disrespect or discrimination when applying, transgender people are disproportionately likely not to have a photo ID. As we've heard and, most likely will hear from others who are testifying, that poverty and the lack of connection to the needed resources, plays a large part in the ability for people to obtain ID's-and the transgender community is disproportionately affected by this



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significant barrier.

4. Just the fact that any of what I stated could happen is enough of a threat that many transgender Mainers may not even risk going to the polls due to the possibilities of being “outed,” interrogated, turned away or discriminated against.

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Our great state is a democracy and putting a hurdle or barrier such as this bill between an eligible voter and their right to vote is harmful for all members of our community. In Maine, we need every voice heard. On behalf of EqualityMaine’s 70,000 members in Maine, we ask the members of the committee to reject this legislation.

Sincerely,

Elise M. Johansen  
Executive Director

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