



TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL KEBEDE, ESQ.

LD 847 – Ought To Pass

**An Act to Prohibit Housing Discrimination**

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

March 10, 2025

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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, greetings. My name is Michael Kebede, and I am Policy Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, a statewide organization committed to advancing and preserving civil liberties guaranteed by the Maine and U.S. Constitutions. On behalf of our members, I urge you to support LD 847, legislation that would expand the civil rights of renters in Maine.

The Housing Choice Voucher program is the nation's largest rental housing program. It is a program that requires a public-private partnership by providing vouchers for people living in poverty to supplement their rent payments to private landlords. Yet all too often this endeavor by the federal government is a public program without private partners, because there is no prohibition in many states against landlords rejecting renters solely because they use a voucher to pay for their housing. Even though vouchers provide payment guaranteed by the federal government, many landlords refuse to rent to people because of biases against people living in poverty.

Maine was an early adopter of legislation prohibiting housing discrimination of this sort. In 1975, the Maine's Human Rights Act was amended to prohibit discrimination against renters who receive federal, state or local public assistance. 5 M.R.S.A. § 4581-A. Unfortunately, in *Dussault v. RRE Coach Lantern Holdings*, 2014 ME 8, the Law Court's interpretation of this statute made it virtually meaningless. Because of the Law Court's decision, landlords in Maine may discriminate against renters because the renters hold vouchers. All too often, this leads people who have the means to rent an apartment with a voucher without a place to rent.

We urge you to vote *ought to pass*.