



Dear Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Terence Miller and I'm the Advocacy Director at Preble Street, a nonprofit human service agency with over fifteen programs serving the most vulnerable people across the state of Maine. The mission of [Preble Street](#) is to provide accessible barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems. I am writing on behalf of Preble Street to strongly support the passage of LD 1871- a two-year extension of the Dignity Pilot.

Preble Street witnesses the daily humiliations that people experiencing homelessness face, such as discrimination, criminalization, stigmatization, and dehumanization. Compared to people who are housed, people experiencing homelessness are disproportionately likely to be restricted from public places (which often provide needed restrooms or shelter from the elements), arrested for petty crimes, harassed on the streets, and discriminated against by service providers and the public because of implicit bias, societal stigma, and structural discrimination. The conversion of anecdotal evidence of discrimination against people experiencing homelessness into documentation is severely hampered due to the pandemic. COVID is causing even further isolation and discrimination of people experiencing homelessness resulting in numerous barriers in filing of discrimination complaints. Quickly the world went virtual causing socio-economic issues for those with housing; imagine that reality for the unhoused. For people experiencing homelessness, there was no infrastructure support of computer access, portable charging stations, or navigator assistance to assist people in completing the necessary Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) complaint process. Preble Street strongly believes that the Dignity Pilot needs to be extended an additional two years, to allow people who experienced discrimination due to their housing status a chance to file their discrimination complaints with the Commission.

Negative stereotypes and disparate treatment from landlords, employers, medical professionals, service providers, and police reduce people's safety and health and can lead to people remaining homeless for longer periods of time. The physical challenges of surviving homelessness are significant, including limited access to shelter, food, and healthcare. When stigma, harassment, and mistreatment compound these challenges, people feel isolated, undervalued, and dehumanized. [Many of these indignities go unreported](#) and it is degrading not to provide a reliable place and means for people to have these incidents and complaints received, reviewed, and investigated.

Preble Street would also like to thank Rep. Rachel Talbot-Ross for her sponsorship of LD 1871.

[Preble Street strongly supported LD 1294 during its initial passage](#) and urges the committee to extend this pilot period an additional 2 years by supporting LD 1871.

*Submitted January 25, 2022*