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Resolve, To Establish the Commission To Study Business Ownership by Racial and Ethnic Populations and the Wealth Gap in the State

Emergency preamble. Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

Whereas, recent reports reveal that the ongoing structural barriers to wealth equality in the nation cannot be combated at the individual or household level, and that public policy is needed to eliminate racial wealth disparities; and

Whereas, Maine needs to undertake a study to determine which policy interventions will have the most impact on bridging the wealth gap between historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic populations and the rest of the citizens in the State; and

Whereas, this legislation establishes the Commission To Study Business Ownership by Racial and Ethnic Populations and the Wealth Gap in the State; and

Whereas, the study must be initiated before the 90-day period expires in order that the study may be completed and a report submitted in time for submission to the next legislative session; and

Whereas, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

Sec. 1 Commission established. Resolved: That the Commission To Study Business Ownership by Racial and Ethnic Populations and the Wealth Gap in the State, referred to in this resolve as "the commission," is established; and be it further

Sec. 2 Commission membership. Resolved: That the commission consists of the following 13 members:

1. Two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, including members from each of the 2 parties holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature;
2. Four members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House, including members from each of the 2 parties holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature;
3. A representative of a community development organization appointed by the President of the Senate;
4. A representative of an economic policy organization appointed by the Speaker of the House;
5. The administrator of the Maine District Office of the federal Small Business Administration, or the administrator's designee;

6. Two members of the public engaged in working with communities of color in business development, one of whom is appointed by the President of the Senate and one of whom is appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

7. The president of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, or the president's designee.

The commission shall invite the participation, as a voting member, of a representative of the Native American community; and be it further

Sec. 3 Chairs. Resolved: That the first-named Senate member is the Senate chair and the first-named House of Representatives member is the House chair of the commission; and be it further

Sec. 4 Appointments; convening of commission. Resolved: That all appointments must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. The appointing authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments have been completed. After appointment of all members, the chairs shall call and convene the first meeting of the commission. If 30 days or more after the effective date of this resolve a majority of but not all appointments have been made, the chairs may request authority and the Legislative Council may grant authority for the commission to meet and conduct its business; and be it further

Sec. 5 Duties. Resolved: That the commission shall study income levels of and opportunities available to historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic populations in the State and shall examine quantitative and qualitative data associated with those populations regarding business ownership, household assets, debts and income, housing, employment and access to inherited wealth, capital and benefits. The commission shall consider proposals to diversify business ownership to include those populations and bridge the gaps in wealth acquisition, including but not limited to, proposals to:

1. Develop a program to provide to aspiring and new business owners technical assistance workshops and training on topics such as the creation of business plans, accessing capital and funding and securing job training;

2. Provide assistance to vendors to become state-certified and to create a register and clearinghouse to serve as a resource for state-certified vendors seeking government contracts; and

3. Establish an office to coordinate the educational and technical assistance needs of emerging small businesses and to provide information to small businesses seeking to open, operate and expand their businesses; and be it further

Sec. 6 Staff assistance. Resolved: That the Legislative Council shall provide necessary staffing services to the commission; and be it further

Sec. 7 Report. Resolved: That, no later than December 6, 2017, the commission shall submit a report that includes its findings and recommendations, including suggested legislation, for presentation to the Second Regular Session of the 128th Legislature.

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

SUMMARY

This resolve establishes the Commission To Study Business Ownership by Racial and Ethnic Populations and the Wealth Gap in the State.