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Senator Nangle, Chair
Representative Stover, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government.

My name is Greg Pierce, I am the legislative coordinator in the governor's office and the governor's liaison to the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission. I am writing regarding LD 2145, Resolve, to Add Members to the Maine Semiquincentennial Commission and Set the Compensation Rate for Commission Members.

I strongly believe the work of the commission established by Resolve 2023, Chapter 126 (LD 1029) will do much to help our understanding of the events leading up to and following the Declaration of Independence in 1776. As the work of the commission commences it is important to bring forward diverse viewpoints and to educate the public on the complex series of issues involved in this event. We also honor the sacrifice of those who fought and those who gave their lives for our independence from Great Britain. We celebrate the founding of our country living under the freedom and security provided by their sacrifice. While the history of the English colonists is so often highlighted, often to the exclusion of all others, many different people inhabited this land and took part in this history. Many struggled and sacrificed over the intervening years so that the ideals of our country would spread and extend to all members of society.

Now, almost 250 years later, as we move forward in examining and interpreting our shared history, please be mindful of some practical matters regarding this bill. I fully support the work and goals of the commission. However, I am concerned that there will now be twenty-eight official members, including the three ex-officio members, a vast expansion from the original eighteen. Honorary members may also be appointed, further expanding the commission. There will be advisory council made up of unlimited members of the public. Seeking broad support and inclusion for a celebration like the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation is of the utmost importance. This can be achieved by a smaller number of members drawing on their expertise and connections to engage with the diverse communities in our state and bring forward the possible concerns, thoughts, suggestions, and goals of the many.

One item of particular concern is that this bill would also allow members to be compensated the legislative per diem for up to four meetings per month. This spending was not included in the original bill Resolve 2023, Chapter 126 (LD 1029). I would urge the committee to consider this very carefully. Several commission members are already compensated by their employer and will not seek the legislative per diem for any meetings, however, many members will. And it is unclear how many members that could possibly be. I would urge the committee to carefully consider the fiscal impact of committing to this spending and press for a comprehensive fiscal note describing these costs.

I thank you for your consideration and I look forward to supporting the great work of the commission to critically examine these historical times and educate the public on these very complex perspectives.