



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD2210 “An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit and a Civil Rights Review Panel Within the Office of the Attorney General and Require Ongoing Enhanced Civil Rights Training for Civil Rights Officers ”

February 21, 2024

Senator Carney , Representative Moonen, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission’s role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

Whether we’re walking down the streets of our neighborhoods or through the doors of public spaces, the freedom and safety of any of us depends on the freedom and safety of all of us. After an initial spike in 2020, hate crimes, as defined by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)¹, remained high in Maine.^{2,3}

According to the 2022 Maine Crime Victimization Report prepared for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, among Mainers who reported being a victim of a crime, 22% believed or suspected that they were targeted based on their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or identity. More than two-thirds of all victims stated that they

¹ U.S. Department of Justice. “Learn about Hate Crimes.” Accessed 12 Jan 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes>.

² U.S. Department of Justice. (2020). Maine Hate Crimes Fact Sheet. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/file/1440386/download>.

³ U.S. Department of Justice. (2023). Hate Crime State Data: Maine. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/state-data/maine>.

did not report the crime to law enforcement. People of color who responded to the survey were more than four times as likely to have experienced a hate crime than their white peers.⁴ We cannot let displays of hate stand unanswered and unchecked,

The Permanent Commission supports LD 2210 because a state-level response is deeply needed to address the recent rise in hate crimes and hate group activity. Currently, the response to hate crimes throughout the state can vary greatly depending on the capacity, training, and presence of local law enforcement. Understanding this, the Permanent Commission supports the approach of creating a state-level unit capable of responding to hate-based violations. Establishing a Civil Rights Unit in the Attorney General's office could help shine a light on the reality of hate activity in Maine, protecting the underserved victims of these crimes and preventing further activity in the future.

When Mainers join together across race and place, we can create stronger communities that are resilient to the fear and anger that breeds hate. The Permanent Commission supports LD 2210 in its efforts to create consistent, accurate, and accessible routes to addressing hate crimes and hate group activity across the state. Hate best prospers when left unseen and unaddressed. By shining a light on this activity, LD 2210 ensures communities in Maine have the information and support necessary to protect themselves and their neighbors. Thank you.

⁴ Murray, C., Dumont, R., & Shaler, G. (2022). 2022 Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing Public Policy for Safer Communities. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine. Available at: <https://rb.gy/7s541t>.

Response to Hate Groups & Hate Crimes

Whether we're walking down the streets of our neighborhoods or through the doors of our public spaces, freedom and safety for any of us depends on the freedom and safety of all of us.

Most of us believe that every person, no matter our religion, where we come from, or what we look like, deserves to live with freedom, safety and belonging. Maine has recently seen an increase in the presence and visibility of self-proclaimed neo-Nazis and other hate groups. We cannot let displays of hate stand unanswered—and this demands a community response from all of us. We must dismantle racism, hate, and all of the machinery used to generate fear and divide us against each other.

When Mainers join together with our neighbors across race and place, we can shut down the fear and protect each other. Our communities must show up for each other every time one of us is targeted because of our differences, and reject anyone who uses fear to divide us against each other. The state of Maine also has a responsibility to ensure that there are structures capable of addressing hate crimes and hate speech that are safe and accessible. Together we can build a Maine that fulfills the promise of freedom and safety for all of us, no exceptions.

Measures of Injustice

After a spike in 2020, hate crimes, defined by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) as “crimes committed on the basis of the victim’s perceived or actual race, color, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or disability,”¹ remain high in Maine.^{2,3}

In 2022, among Mainers who reported being a victim of a crime, 22% believed or suspected that they were targeted based on their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation or identity. People of color who responded to the survey were more than four times as likely to have experienced a hate crime than their white peers.⁴

In 2022 (the latest year for which data is available), the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) tracked nine active hate groups, defined by SPLC as “an organization that [...] has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people,”⁵ in Maine. That’s more than double the number of active groups that were tracked in 2021.⁶

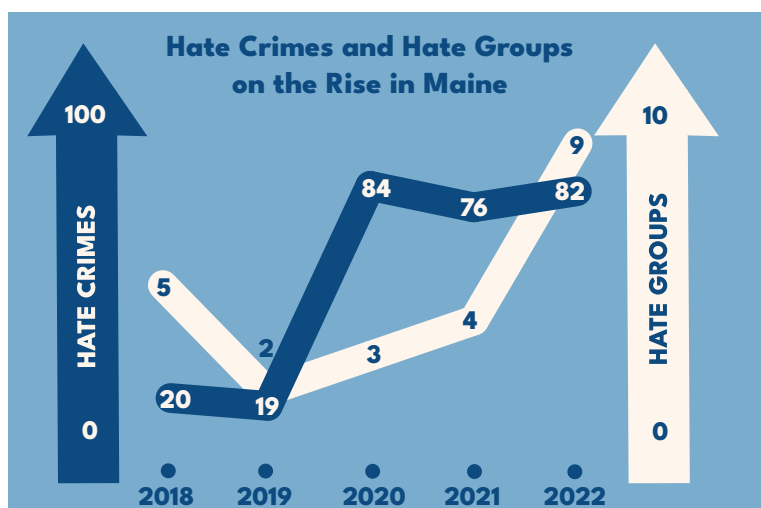


Figure 9. Hate crimes, as tracked by DOJ, and hate groups, as tracked by SPLC, are on the rise in Maine. Data from U.S. DOJ. (2020), (2023) and SPLC (2021).

Moving Toward Justice in 2024

STRENGTHEN OUR RESPONSE TO HATE

- **Pass LD 2210 - An Act to Establish a Civil Rights Unit Within the Office of the Attorney General and Provide Public Education on Issues Regarding Hate and Bias**

The Permanent Commission supports this bill to improve Maine’s response to the recent rise in hate crimes and visibility of hate groups in Maine. We support the approach of creating a state-level unit capable of responding to reports of hate crimes. This is an important step because the response to a reported hate crime can vary depending on the capacity, training, and presence of local law enforcement. Many areas of rural Maine do not have a municipal police department, and county sheriff departments or state police units may not have enough resources to respond to hate crimes if they are reported. Additionally, factors such as personal history with racial profiling may discourage the people who are most likely to be the targets of hate crimes from contacting law enforcement agencies to file reports. A Civil Rights Unit in the Attorney General’s office could serve as a critical resource for underserved victims to report hate crimes.

References

- 1 U.S. Department of Justice. “Learn about Hate Crimes.” Accessed 12 Jan 2024.
<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes>
- 2 U.S. Department of Justice. (2020). Maine Hate Crimes Fact Sheet. Available at:
<https://www.justice.gov/file/1440386/download>
- 3 U.S. Department of Justice. (2023). Hate Crime State Data: Maine. Available at:
<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/state-data/maine>
- 4 Murray, C., Dumont, R., & Shaler, G. (2022). 2022 Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing Public Policy for Safer Communities. Maine Statistical Analysis Center. University of Southern Maine. Available at: <https://rb.gy/7s541t>
- 5 Southern Poverty Law Center. (2022). Frequently Asked Questions About Hate and Antigovernment Groups.
<https://www.splcenter.org/20220216/frequently-asked-questions-about-hate-and-antigovernment-groups#hate-group>
- 6 Southern Poverty Law Center. (2021) “Hate Map.” Accessed 12 Jan 2024. Available at:
<https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map?year=2021&state=ME>