



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD 847 “An Act to Prohibit Housing Discrimination ”

March 10, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, 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.

The Policy Committee of the Permanent Commission recognizes access to secure, safe, housing as foundational to advancing of racial equity on all fronts. Denying rentals to those using federal, state, or local housing assistance programs is a form of housing discrimination that unjustly targets Maine’s most vulnerable populations. Discrimination against voucher holders disproportionately impacts people of color as well as folks with disabilities, families with children, and survivors of domestic violence.

Housing is a place where it is easy to see the effects of compounding discrimination. For historically disadvantaged populations, income disparities, geographic limitations, and cultural barriers, can make it extremely difficult to access affordable housing. Today, over 70% of the state’s Black residents are renters, compared with only 25% of the state’s white residents, making Maine 48th out of 50 states on a national housing equity index.¹ As these factors compound, we see racial disparities

¹ https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/homeownership_disparity/ME#

manifest not just in housing, but also in the state's unhoused populations. Since 2019, Maine experienced a more than 3-fold increase in homelessness², with roughly 47% of those experiencing homelessness from Black communities, despite these communities making up only 1.6% of the state's population.³

Disparities in housing in turn have an impact on all other social determinants of health. Access to affordable, stable housing reduces exposure to transmissible disease⁴, increases long-term economic security⁵, and provides children and families an environment in which they can grow and flourish.⁶

QUICK FACTS

The average income needed to purchase a median-priced home in Maine today is **\$106,225**. The median income in Maine is **\$68,316**.

Maine has the nation's lowest rental vacancy rate (2.1%) as of 2023.

47% of the state's unhoused population is Black, despite only making up **1.6% of Maine's population**.

Only **28%** of Black Mainers own their home, compared with **76%** of white Mainers.

Maine ranks 50th out of 50 states in terms of racial equity in homeownership.

Everyone deserves a fair chance at finding housing regardless of their race, family composition, disability status, history, or source of income. Those navigating the hardships of our state's housing crisis, should not be further punished or dismissed for their efforts to survive. Access to housing is an essential key to building better futures for all communities who call Maine Home.

² The Maine Point in Time study changed its methodology in 2020 to include individuals living in transitional housing. The statistic offered here represents an approximation of the real increase in homelessness with those data removed from analysis.

³ MaineHousing. (2023). 2023 Point in Time Count. Available at: <https://rb.gy/xOfrf>

⁴ Ralli, M., et al. (2020). "Homeless persons and migrants in precarious housing conditions and COVID-19 pandemic: peculiarities and prevention strategies." *European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences* 24.18; 9765-9767.

⁵ Di, Z.X. and Yang, Y. (2002). "Intergenerational Wealth Transfer and its Impact on Housing: A report of the Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University. Available at: https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/media/imp/di_w02-2.pdf

⁶ Fowler, P. J., & Farrell, A. F. (2017). Housing and child well being: implications for research, policy, and practice. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 60(1-2), 3-8.