



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

Testimony in Support of LD 2136

An Act to Support Victims of Trafficking in Maine in Response to Federal Funding Cuts Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

February 4, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Sam Zuckerman. I am the Policy Coordinator of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission's Policy Committee in support of LD 2136, "An Act to Support Victims of Trafficking in Maine in Response to Federal Funding Cuts."

Victims of trafficking and exploitation deserve to be fully supported and cared for as they recover from the trauma that they have experienced. And even though much of the published data on sex trafficking fails to include the racial or ethnic background of survivors, there is still clear evidence that youth and adults from BIPOC communities are especially vulnerable to being targeted for commercial sexual exploitation.¹ A study between 2008 and 2010 found that 40% of federal human trafficking victims were Black women, compared to 26% being white women.² In Maine, 12% of people of color have experienced trafficking, while only 2% of white people have.³ And the information that we do have about rates of trafficking of Indigenous people indicate that the disparities faced by them are staggering: a study on

¹ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2011, August). Commercial sexual exploitation of children and sex trafficking. https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/commercial_sexual_exploitation_of_children_and_sex_trafficking.pdf

² U.S. Department of Justice. (2011, April). Characteristics of suspected human trafficking incidents, 2008-2010. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/cshti0810.pdf>

³ The Catherine Cutler Institute. (2022, July). 2022 Maine crime victimization report: Informing public policy for safer communities. https://bpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/wpsites.maine.edu/dist/2/115/files/2023/01/2022-Maine-Crime-Victimization-Report_Final.pdf

commercial sexual exploitation impacting Native women located in Minnesota found that nearly half of the participants had been impacted by sex trafficking.⁴ Indigenous women are also murdered at a rate 10 times higher than the national average and incidences of missing Indigenous women often go uninvestigated by federal authorities.⁵

These inequities are linked to other overlapping inequities that communities of color face. 47% of unhoused people in Maine come from Black communities and Hispanic, Indigenous, and Black Mainers all face higher rates of poverty and are paid lower incomes for the same work than white Mainers.⁶ Youth from communities of color also experience additional disparities in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.⁷ In the justice system in particular, youth of color are often treated as consenting adults by law enforcement due to harmful stereotypes that portray them as more sexually mature than white youth, leaving youth of color even more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.⁸ It is critical that we support victims of trafficking and exploitation so that they are able to heal from their trauma and build the future that they want for themselves.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We urge you to vote in support of this bill.

⁴ Minnesota Indian Women's Sexual Assault Coalition, Prostitution Research & Education. (2011, October 27). Garden of truth: The prostitution and trafficking of Native women in Minnesota.

<https://www.niwc.org/sites/default/files/images/resource/Garden-of-Truth.pdf>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, June). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2016/2017 report on sexual violence.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/nisvsReportonSexualViolence.pdf>

⁶ MaineHousing. (n.d.). 2023 Point in Time Count. https://www.mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/housing-reports/2023-point-in-time.pdf?sfvrsn=e1c28015_5; U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). Poverty status in the past 12 months. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2021.S1701>; U.S. Department of Labor. (2020). Earnings disparities by race and ethnicity. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ofccp/about/data/earnings/race-and-ethnicity>

⁷ Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services (2025). Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Maine. Page 17. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xeikUSu6ulqlQNMWoQKq56FH9GEhlG1/view>

⁸ See note 7.