



**Permanent  
Commission  
RACIAL, INDIGENOUS  
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

**Testimony of the  
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations  
*In Support of***

**LD 1703, “An Act to Amend the Maine Equal Pay Law by Prohibiting Pay  
Discrimination Based on Race”**

Tuesday, May 16, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Morgan Pottle Urquhart, I live in Bangor, and I am the Policy and Communications Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations.

The Permanent Commission was established in 2019 as an independent entity with a mission to examine racial disparities across all systems and to specifically work at improving the status and outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the state. The Permanent Commission is empowered by statute to advise and consult with all three branches of state government, as well as submit legislation. Occupying a unique position in state government, the Permanent Commission represents a broad cross section of people most impacted by racial harm and colonization who have been excluded from policy making throughout Maine’s history.

I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 1703, “An Act to Amend the Maine Equal Pay Law by Prohibiting Pay Discrimination Based on Race.” We extend deep gratitude to Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross for introducing this bill.

Most people, no matter our skin color, desire similar things - to care for ourselves and our families, to live happy, vibrant lives, and to have this experience now and for generations to come. That’s the American Dream. But here in Maine and in the rest of the country, there are structural factors that make that dream harder to achieve for some than others. Our systems and structures don’t work the same for everyone, and the policy choices we make often exacerbate disparities.

Systemic racism is a driving force behind many of the disparities we can see all around us. Collectively, and when considered by education level, Mainers of color earn lower wages than their white peers.<sup>1</sup> Median income for US-born Black households in Maine is 16% lower than

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<sup>1</sup> Myall, James. The State of Working Maine 2020. Maine Center for Economic Policy. November 2020. <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/report-state-of-working-maine-2020>.

their white neighbors – 36% lower for Indigenous households, and 60% lower for Black immigrant households.<sup>2</sup>

While no single factor is responsible for the racial wage gap, discrimination by individual employers could be responsible for up to a third of the gap.<sup>2</sup> Expanding the Maine Equal Pay Law to prohibit wage disparities between employees at the same establishment on the basis of race is an important step toward fair wages for all. With this bill, we can move toward being a place where all Mainers can earn a fair return for their work.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Myall, James. The State of Working Maine 2020. Maine Center for Economic Policy. November 2020. <https://www.meccep.org/maines-economy/report-state-of-working-maine-2020>.