

Testimony in support of LD 1432, "An Act to Increase the Inclusion of Demographic Data in the Legislative Process"

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Good Afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is James Myall. I'm an Economic Policy Analyst with the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and I'm here today to testify in support of LD 1432, "An Act to Increase the Inclusion of Demographic Data in the Legislative Process." As a data-driven policy organization MECEP believes in the importance of collecting and analyzing data on all Mainers to help lawmakers make informed decisions about our collective well-being. LD 1432 would improve our ability to do so by dedicating capacity at the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis to providing information on some of Maine's most disadvantaged populations.

This bill, with its proposed amendment, would build on the work of the racial impact statement pilot project, which has helped you and your colleagues gain important insights into the impact of potential legislation. MECEP believes the approach taken in LD 1432 is an improvement on the previous racial impact statement process because it would place responsibility for demographic analysis in the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis, which already has experience conducting bill analysis in an efficient and timely manner. The racial impact statements which were completed in the pilot project last legislature provided useful information, but varied in their approaches and often took a substantial amount of time to complete. Hopefully the institutionalization of demographic analysis within OPLA will make for more consistent analysis at a faster pace.

The directive for the new analyst to use data from state agencies is especially important when it comes to racial populations in Maine. While we do have some information on these groups which is gathered in public data sources such as the surveys conducted by the Census Bureau, the usefulness of this data is hampered by the small size of Maine's communities of color, which makes sampling error significant in most surveys. By contrast, administrative data can often provide us with an exact count of the individuals impacted by a potential policy change.

Maine and the United States have a long history of enacting policies that disadvantage people of color, which have created generations of economic and social disparities. To avoid making these worse, and indeed to reverse them, it is imperative for lawmakers to be armed with data on the impacts of future policy. For those reasons, I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1432 to move us towards more evidence-based anti-racist policy-making.

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