



# Maine Equal Justice

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## **MEJ Testimony in Support of LD 1948, *An Act to Amend the State's Data Governance Program Regarding Proprietary Data***

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Good afternoon, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the Advocacy and Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Today I am testifying in support of LD 1948.

LD 1948 builds upon work began with LD 1610 in the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session to address challenges around data collection in Maine. Data tells us that there are significant socio-economic disparities based on race, ethnicity, and tribal status in Maine. We see this when we look at the data in systems like education, health care, housing, employment, income, wealth, criminal justice, and impacts of climate change. However, too often we lack key data at the state level to fully inform our understanding of how policies work or don't work for Maine people. That data is essential to help lawmakers make informed decisions around the positive or negative impact of the policies they consider each legislative session. The steps proposed by Speaker Talbot Ross in the amendment before you would help the State fulfill the goal of having high quality demographic data across state government.

We are particularly pleased to see a requirement to consult with the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations and an annual convening of a stakeholder group to help inform the work undertaken by state government. As states like Maine work to improve data collection and better utilize existing data to identify disparate impacts of policies, it is important that the process include "an awareness of data gaps and potential misinterpretations" of the data being analyzed.<sup>1</sup> The Permanent Commission brings a deep understanding of dynamics around racial equity, and the stakeholder group can provide an outside perspective on the work being undertaken by state government. Both can help bring an awareness of issues that may be invisible to those deeply engaged in the day-to-day details of technology systems and internal processes.

Improved data collection and sharing can help improve our understanding of the policies already in place in Maine and of the potential impacts of policies considered by lawmakers each

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nashp.org/data-strategies-to-understand-and-address-health-disparities/>

legislative session. We took an important step in improving state-level data last legislative session with the passage of LD 1610. Maine can take another important step this year by passing LD 1948. For these reasons we urge you to support this bill and help improve our collective understanding of who is impacted in what ways by the policies we undertake. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today.