



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

***Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross introducing
LD 247, "An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the
State"***

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
February 10, 2025*

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Senator Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent Senate District 28, which includes part of Portland and Peaks Island. I am here today to introduce LD 247, *An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the State*.

LD 247 is an important and well-conceived bill, which represents the culmination of many months of intensive research, community engagement efforts, and a deliberate and painstaking policy development process involving subject-area experts and stakeholders from around the state, all of whom are deeply invested in streamlining the convoluted procedures involved in naming and renaming places in Maine and making the process more participatory, transparent, and accessible.

However, I come before you today not to advocate for its passage but instead to ask that you vote "ought not to pass."

This is not a reflection of the bill's merit. Rather, it is a recognition of the current political realities at the federal level, which have significantly undermined the integrity of the place-naming process.

On January 20th, a new executive order was issued that directly overrides the authority of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and allows for unilateral changes to major geographic features. Among these changes was the renaming of the "Gulf of Mexico" to the "Gulf of America," bypassing the established review and public input processes. Another directive reversed the decision to restore the name "Denali" to a mountain sacred to Alaska Natives, reinstating "Mount McKinley" instead.

These actions, regardless of one's political perspective, highlight a troubling shift in how place names are determined — a shift that undercuts the thoughtful and participatory approach that LD 247 seeks to promote. If decisions about geographic names can be made unilaterally at the federal level without regard for local and historical considerations, then efforts to establish a consistent and fair process in Maine become significantly more challenging.

LD 247 grew out of a decades-long effort to address racist and derogatory place names in Maine, one that began when my father, the honorable Gerald E. Talbot, learned in 1974 of ten geographical features in Maine bearing the "N-word" in their name. Representative Talbot's "Act to Prohibit the Use of



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Offensive Names for Geographic Features and Other Places Within the State of Maine” was signed into law in 1977 and made national headlines. Four decades later, soon after becoming a Representative myself, I was shocked to learn that my father’s landmark bill had not been effectively enforced.

Further research carried out in the context of the Place Justice initiative has revealed that, to this day, 16 racial and ethnic slurs remain on our maps, along with 12 derogatory terms, and hundreds of problematic commemorative names that honor individuals who harmed Black and Indigenous people.

The Maine Board on Place Names that LD 247 sought to create would have provided a mechanism for addressing racist place names, but it also would have helped to standardize basic (re)naming procedures and make a convoluted system legible to and accessible to the general public.

While the need for such a board remains, the unfortunate reality is that federal actions have disrupted the system in ways that make its implementation impractical at this time. I remain deeply committed to ensuring that Maine’s place-naming policies reflect our values of respect, inclusion, and historical accuracy. I hope that in the future, we will have the opportunity to revisit this effort under more favorable conditions.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the committee vote "ought not to pass."

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Talbot Ross".

Rachel Talbot Ross
State Senator, District 28
Representing part of Portland and Peaks Island