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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher in support of
**LD 1202, An Act to Establish the African American Studies
Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African
American Studies**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Laurie Osher, and I represent House District 25 in Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to speak as a cosponsor in support of **LD 1202, An Act to Establish the African American Studies Advisory Council and Provide Funding to Support African American Studies**.

While I was growing up in the Philadelphia area, I saw the results of racism in the form of what is known as “Red Lining” without ever knowing that it was a result of public policy. I lived in the suburb of Elkins Park, in Montgomery County, just north of the Philadelphia city line.

The City of Philadelphia, in Philadelphia County - the city line and border of the counties just one mile to the south of my house - had a population of 2 million, and 25% of the people living there were Black. Some of the most impoverished and degraded urban communities were in North Philadelphia - just south of Elkins Park. Montgomery County, where I lived, with a population of 500,000, was just 3% Black.

We'd drive south on Broad Street from Elkins Park into the City to attend Synagogue, and I wondered aloud, How could this be? Why were our neighboring communities so impoverished? How did this happen?

My mother was a real estate agent, and even she didn't know about Red Lining, a public policy that identified areas where there would be no investment. The same policy identified where

investment would be encouraged. Where people of color lived, there was a "Red Line". People of color and those without a lot of personal wealth would not be able to get mortgages to buy their own home there. Only those with the ability to purchase with cash or who could back loans with the evidence of other wealth could buy property there. The homes there were all owned by landlords. Those living there could not buy homes. The Red Lining was part of a legacy of racism that was being perpetuated and kept people of color in poverty while white people living in the neighboring communities were able to get financing to buy homes and establish wealth as part of the American Dream. Wealthy people were able to buy properties and build wealth by renting to others. Too many of those landlords allowed the properties in the Red Lined neighborhoods to deteriorate due to lack of maintenance. Passing through North Philadelphia, I saw urban decay and poverty - created by Red Lining.

The impact of racism and racial discrimination-based public policy on my own life and the benefits allowed to my family were kept from my neighbors. These facts were never taught to me or my parents in the public schools. I didn't learn about the facts of Red Lining in cities around the US until graduate school - even though I witnessed the impacts throughout my childhood and young adulthood.

I'm pleased to say that even though my school curriculum didn't include it, I did know about some of the amazing contributions of Black Americans - National heroes, some of them Philadelphians. Our synagogue invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak when I was in elementary school. I knew that Marian Anderson, a Philadelphian who was a fabulous singer and had been prohibited from singing in Constitution Hall by the Daughters of the American Republic, had been invited by Eleanor Roosevelt to sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The great Joe Frazier was from Philly, as were basketball greats Wilt Chamberlain and "Dr. J" - Julius Irving. Runner Wilma Rudolph was from Philly. The great baseball player Jackie Robinson went to my High School. It was clear that there were great Americans making history.... But none of that information was part of the curriculum in my school.

Times have changed. Now the Federal Government recognizes Martin Luther King's birthday as a national holiday, and February is Black History Month, but we're still missing the requirement that African American History be part of the school curriculum.

Maine's school curriculum should include how past and present practices have disadvantaged the African Americans in Maine and the US and how African Americans have contributed important discoveries, leadership, and excellence.

I encourage you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1202.