



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

LD 2 (130th Legislature, 2021):

1. **Study Phase (2021):** The Legislative Council studied best practices from other states, needed data, and relevant policy areas.
2. **Pilot Program (2022):** A limited trial was conducted in specific committees.
3. **Full Implementation (Ongoing):** Based on findings, the system is rolled out to provide lawmakers with analyses before voting on bills.

Other Key Bills & Initiatives:

- **LD 274 (131st Legislature, 2021):** Enacted as an emergency measure (PL Chapter 34), this resolve directed the Maine Health Data Organization to study and report on racial/ethnic disparities in healthcare data collection. Once passed, it mandated the MHDO to determine the best methods for collecting data to understand racial disparities in healthcare and submit a report to the legislature. 130th State Legislature.
- **Data Governance (PL 2021, c. 717):** Established a data governance program, requiring consultation with the Permanent Commission on Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations to build racial equity into data lifecycle (collection, analysis, dissemination).
- **LD 1948 (131st Legislature, 2021):** Aimed to standardize definitions for demographic data fields (race, ethnicity, etc.) and ensure stakeholder groups for data initiatives are diverse.
- **LD 590 (132nd Legislature, 2025):** Seeks to ensure nonpartisan legislative staff collect demographic data for legislative committees.



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**Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross
LD 590, "An Act Regarding the Inclusion of Racial and Other Demographic Data from
State Agencies in the Legislative Process."**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. I am Senator Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent Senate District 28, which includes part of Portland, part of the Casco Bay Islands, and includes the University of Southern Maine Campus. I am here today to present LD 590, "An Act Regarding the Inclusion of Racial and Other Demographic Data from State Agencies in the Legislative Process."

Back in 2021, during the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature, Maine took the historic step in addressing long-standing racial disparities that existed across all systems by enacting LD 2 which did several things:

The first section defines a *racial impact statement* as an assessment of the potential impact that legislation could have on historically disadvantaged racial populations.

The second portion created a study by the Legislative Council to determine the best method in which to establish and implement a system of using racial impact statements.

The third then directed the Legislative Council to conduct a limited pilot project - based on the findings - for the use of racial impact statements in the Second Regular Session of the 130th Legislature. I have a copy of the final report on the pilot for the committee to review at your convenience.

So, LD 2 defined a racial impact statement, required its usage in the legislative process, and set out a process to determine the best methodology for implementation.

Very quickly, that process is upon request of a legislative committee, the commissioner of a department or director of an agency is directed to provide data, analysis, and other information necessary for lawmakers to determine whether pending legislation is likely to create or exacerbate existing racial disparities.



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As this committee knows, Maine is not alone in the use of this important data-driven tool in the legislative process. At least nine other states have also implemented mechanisms for the preparation and consideration of racial impact statements: Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, and Virginia as well as the District of Columbia and several municipalities across the country including Seattle and New York City.

However, the full implementation of LD 2 - Maine Public Law Chapter 21 - has not been realized and our goal to proactively prevent new laws from worsening existing racial disparities and to help undo effects of structural racism has not been met.

I believe that LD 590 is one way to take a step forward in our efforts. This bill requires nonpartisan legislative staff to collect and assemble racial data from state agencies that is related to legislation before joint standing or select committees of the Legislature.

It also takes another historic step through the inclusion of other demographic data, such as gender, age, socio-economic status, geography, and disability.

With the passage of LD 590, I believe it will encourage lawmakers to pursue more intentional and equitable policy solutions, rather than relying on race neutral - or gender, age, geographical, socio-economic class, mental or physical ability neutral - approaches that can still produce disparate results.

With the passage of LD 590, I believe that Maine will truly make the best possible decisions for our state - now - and for generations to follow.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to support LD 590. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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