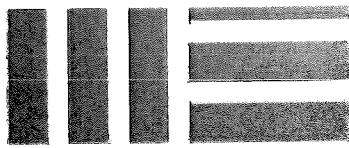


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People Policy Solutions

Testimony in support of LD 590, An Act Regarding the Inclusion of Racial and Other Demographic Data from State Agencies in the Legislative Process

January 21, 2026

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio. I use she/her pronouns and I'm the Advocacy & Programs Director at Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit civil legal aid and economic justice organization working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. I am testifying today in support of the LD 590 and the sponsor's proposed amendment.

When legislators are making decisions about proposed changes to Maine law, it is essential they have data to determine how the policies they are considering will impact different populations in Maine. We know policies can have different impacts for different populations - whether that is intentional or not. Knowing about those impacts prior to deciding on your support for legislation can help legislators make better informed decisions about policies.

Data tells us that there are significant socio-economic disparities based on race, ethnicity, tribal status, and other demographics in Maine. We see this when we look at the data in systems like education, health care, housing, employment, income, wealth, criminal justice, and more. Since these systems all intersect and contribute to overall wealth, it's not surprising that we see some of the starker of these disparities in poverty rates. For us at Maine Equal Justice, this is most notable when looking at poverty data.

Census data illustrates disparities in poverty rates.

(<https://www.mecep.org/blog/census-data-shows-most-mainers-ahead-compared-to-pre-pandemic-but-poorest-still-struggling/>) 10.4% of Mainers who identify as White, Non Hispanic are living in poverty. Mainers who identify as Hispanic, American Indian, or of two or more races all experience higher rates of poverty with the highest rate - 26% - experienced by Black Mainers. The disparities we see in different areas are the result of a complex set of factors, including unfair laws and policies.

As lawmakers, you have a significant role in not only working to undo the effects of structural racism in our laws, but to also prevent further harm as you consider new laws. Furthermore, you have the opportunity to be proactive with policies that intentionally work to reduce disparities. The stark racial disparities in poverty in our state won't begin to change until we craft laws that explicitly target those disparities. For example, in the 130th legislative session, when the HHS Committee was considering legislation to expand eligibility to the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to 300%, data provided during the process showed that this would benefit a majority of Maine children - and it would also reduce disparities in health care coverage for Black, Indigenous, and children of color. At the time, it was estimated that 43.7% of BIPOC children in the income range impacted by the bill were uninsured while 23.5% of white children in that income range lacked health insurance.

(<https://legislature.maine.gov/testimony/resources/HHS20210224Pilot132911396791438388.pdf>)
By ultimately passing this law, legislators helped children of all races while also proactively addressing historical inequities for BIPOC children.

Lawmakers need the best information available to inform your decisions around questions of positive or negative impact for different demographics. LD 590 would provide you with additional information from a nonpartisan source when you are considering legislation.

Thank you for your consideration. We urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 590. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.