



Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
**in support**  
LD 1274, An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations

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Sear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Winston and I live in Edgecomb. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1274, *An Act to Increase Land Access for Historically Disadvantaged Populations*, on behalf of CEI - a mission-driven community development financial institution (CDFI) based in Brunswick. CEI works to build a just, vibrant, and climate-resilient future for people and communities in Maine and rural regions. We do this by integrating finance, business expertise, and policy solutions to make the economy more equitable.

The Black Farmer Restoration Program Act will make the economy more equitable by encouraging the growth of Black farmers in the field of agriculture. Its reparative Black Farmer Restoration Fund land grants and Farmer Conservation Corps apprenticeships support existing socially disadvantaged farmers and small organic farms, to redress/reduce longstanding disparities in access to land and technical training and promote agricultural entrepreneurship. In addition to its economic benefits and impact, the program will support community development efforts among farmers of color and create an infrastructure for more equitable access to ag related resources.

While CEI was not involved in developing this bill, CEI represents CDFIs on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations and supported LD 870, *Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African American and Indigenous Farmers in the State*, which passed in the 130<sup>th</sup> legislature. In its report back to this Committee, "Land Access for Indigenous & African American Farmers in Maine", the Permanent Commission study team demonstrated clear impacts of land dispossession, displacement, and enslavement on these communities' economic and food security, health and ability to access and cultivate land.

"To transform systems," the report calls for "policies and practices that fundamentally counter the racial inequities imposed on ... communities of color throughout US history and seek to redress historic wrongs across sectors" (p.3). The report compares low farm ownership and high food security rates among Black/African Americans in Maine in particular, and the need for forward looking programs that are reparative, to increase land access and provide "equal footing" to farm-specific technical training, grants, and financing for Black/African American and farmers from other socially disadvantaged groups to foster these communities' ability to grow and market their own food. This program will grow a whole generation of Black/African American farmers and provide the means to access the land needed to grow and market their own food. Maine's economic strategy is to grow and foster innovation in this sector. What could be more innovative than encouraging the growth of diverse business ownership in Maine's food sector.