

Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross
Co-Chair

Amb. Maulian Dana,
Penobscot Nation
Co-Chair



**Permanent
Commission**
**RACIAL, INDIGENOUS
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

**Testimony of the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal
Populations**

In Support of LD 2003

**“An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase
Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use
Restrictions”**

Monday, March 7, 2022

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Whitney A. Parrish, I live in Augusta, and I am the acting executive director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations (hereinafter referred to as the ‘Permanent Commission’). I am honored to be here offering testimony in support of LD 2003, “An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions.” We extend deep gratitude to Speaker Fecteau for introducing this bill and to the members of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities in Maine by Studying Zoning and Land Use Restrictions for their tremendous work this past fall.

The Permanent Commission is an independent entity with a mission to work toward ending structural racism so all communities can thrive. For too long, Maine and the United States have allowed the institutions and policies that drive structural racism to continue. These structures hurt all Maine residents struggling to thrive under these systems. To achieve its mission, the Permanent Commission is empowered to advise and consult all three branches of Maine government, and to introduce legislation. The Permanent Commission examines racial disparities as one tool to combat structural racism and improve the quality of life for all Mainers.

Whether we’re Black, white, brown, Indigenous or newcomer, every Mainer needs housing, and everyone deserves a safe, healthy, affordable place to live their life. Housing is a basic human need—the foundation for our children to grow and thrive, for our elders to rest, a place to tend to our personal and medical needs, and somewhere to call home. Whatever our differences, we can all agree housing is something we all need, and it is something that should be accessible no matter who we are.

Discrimination in housing based on race was legal in the United States as late as the 1960s and one can easily see the effects of this in the shape of segregated cities and towns across the country today. Similarly, exclusionary zoning laws have historically been used to separate where people live based on race and income. While discrimination was outlawed, exclusionary zoning laws continue to this day and whether intentional or not, they continue to prevent the building of affordable housing and to push low-income housing into areas with poorer air quality, closer to highways, and farther away from amenities and services. In short, single-family-only zoning

perpetuates inequality and racial discrimination and is known today as the “new redlining.”¹ This has the de facto effect of limiting or prohibiting affordable, mixed-income dwellings where economic opportunity is greatest. LD 2003 starts to correct this history by both prohibiting specific exclusionary zoning policies while also incentivizing towns to adopt further changes to their zoning laws.

A major goal of LD 2003 is to increase the number of affordable housing units in the state. According to Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA), there are currently fewer than 20,000 affordable housing units across the state.² In 2020, 55% percent of Maine households were unable to afford the median rent of a two-bedroom apartment.³ Affordable and acceptable rental housing is more difficult to obtain for racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the state. Those with housing report a lack of basic housing necessities, such as proper facilities or space, at a higher rate than people who are white. In addition, Mainers who represent racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations are significantly more likely to be renters than those who are white. While 27% of white Mainers rent,⁴ that figure is 36% for Native populations in the state,⁵ 45% for Latino Mainers,⁶ and 70% for Black Mainers.⁷ It is clear that racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations have a disproportionately high need for more safe and affordable rental units in the state.

Across our races, backgrounds, and genders, we all want to be treated with dignity and respect. Yet some people demonize our struggling and unhoused neighbors and blame them for structural barriers, such as exclusionary zoning policies, that are bigger than any set of individual choices. They may conveniently lean on zoning policies that have been in place for decades to block efforts to create the affordable housing we need in every single corner of the state. That obstruction hurts all of us, especially Black and African American Mainers who own homes at a much lower rate than their white peers.⁸ It deeply impacts people in rural Maine, and the racial, Indigenous and tribal populations in our state for whom affordable, safe, and acceptable rental housing is more difficult to obtain.

We see LD 2003 as a good-faith effort to correct and prevent some of the most egregious zoning policies while working with local towns to achieve better and more housing development over time. We respectfully urge you to support LD 2003.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony and bill. Please do not hesitate to contact me at whitney.parrish@maine.gov with any questions, or if additional information is desired.

¹ Jackson, Candace. “What Is Redlining?” *The New York Times*, 17 Aug. 2021, www.nytimes.com/2021/08/17/realestate/what-is-redlining.html.

² 2021 Maine Housing Profile, National Low Income Housing Coalition, <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/6960>

³ Rental Affordability Indexes, Maine Housing, <https://mainehousing.org/policy-research/housing-data/affordability-indexes>

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Occupied housing units with a householder who is White alone. American Community Survey. 2019 1-Year Estimates. Retrieved March 7, 2022 from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B25003a&q=0400000US23>

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Occupied housing units with a householder who is American Indian and Alaska Native alone. American Community Survey. 2019 1-Year Estimates. Retrieved March 7, 2022 from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B25003c&q=0400000US23>

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Occupied housing units with a householder who is Hispanic or Latino. American Community Survey. 2019 1-Year Estimates. Retrieved March 7, 2022 from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B25003i&q=0400000US23>

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, Occupied housing units with a householder who is Black or African American alone. American Community Survey. 2019 1-Year Estimates. Retrieved March 7, 2022 from: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=B25003b&q=0400000US23>

⁸ Subpopulations: Homeownership Racial Disparity, Maine, United States, America’s Health Rankings,

https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/homeownership_disparity/population/homeownership_white/state/ME