



TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS

LD 1034, An Act To Provide Funding To Support the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations

OUGHT TO PASS

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

April 14, 2021

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Mary Bonauto, and I live in Portland. I am an attorney at GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (“GLAD”), a legal rights organization that works throughout New England to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation.

GLAD supports LD 1034, *An Act To Provide Funding To Support the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations*. Our State is committed to the work of making our communities stronger by also addressing those formerly ignored, excluded, or treated as second-class persons. LD 1034 provides the necessary funding for the crucial work of the Permanent Commission. I work for an organization that was once all-volunteer, and I came on as the 5th staff person in 1990. We still rely on volunteers extensively and the Permanent Commission will do so as well. In my experience, it is both unsustainable and a disservice to the Permanent Commission’s crucial mission to ask an all-volunteer effort to continue the already outstanding work of the Permanent Commission in gathering, coordinating and analyzing information and resources from individuals, communities, policy and data and integrating these in real time policy consideration.

To be sure, the volunteer work of the Permanent Commission has been outstanding, and our State will benefit from continued excellence in its work with paid staff positions. Last September, it published its recommendations to this Legislature following its mandate to examine racial disparities and to “specifically work at improving the status and outcomes for the historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations” in Maine.¹ The statistics in this report are both sobering and a legitimate and urgent call for change: Black Mainers are six times more likely to be incarcerated than their white counterparts; the sovereignty of Maine’s tribal populations are routinely overlooked; Maine women of color with college degrees earn only slightly more than a white man with a high school diploma; Black Mainers are far less likely to own their home than a white Mainer; and Mainers of color experience unemployment and poverty at twice the rate of white Mainers.²

¹ PERMANENT COMM’N ON THE STATUS OF RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & ME. TRIBAL POPULATIONS, *Recommendations to the Legislature* 1 (Sept. 2020), https://www.maine.gov/labor/pcrit/reports/2020_LegReport.pdf.

² *Id* at 4.



The Permanent Commission's report included a comprehensive review of 454 bills still active in the 129th Legislature and provided recommendations for priority setting to enact legislation that will begin to rectify these historical and entrenched racial inequities.³ Such work is both welcome and necessary, and GLAD believes that LD 1034 is needed to enable the Permanent Commission to continue its work in the future. As the Permanent Commission notes in its report:

Good policymaking cannot happen without bringing everyone to the table, listening to experts, listening to those affected, and being open to acknowledging the underlying biases that exacerbate inequities.⁴

For all of the above reasons, and to provide the Permanent Commission the means to bring these crucial stakeholders to the proverbial table, and to highlight which statutes and steps are the highest priority to enable the good policymaking, the Permanent Commission should be funded as this bill requests.⁵ Thank you for your consideration, and we hope that you will unanimously vote ought to pass on LD 1034.

Submitted by:

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³ *Id.* at 5.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 5, § 25007 2.D (empowering the Permanent Commission to "Submit to the Legislature, at the start of each regular session, such legislation as the commission determines appropriate for improving opportunities and eliminating disparities for historically disadvantaged racial, indigenous and tribal populations in the State.").