

## Testimony in support of LD 1034 – An Act to Fund the Permanent Commission

April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and esteemed members of the Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Anna Brewer, and I am the Homeless Voices for Justice Team Leader at Preble Street. I am here today on behalf of Preble Street to speak in support of LD1034 An Act to Provide Funding to Support the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations.

Preble Street is a human services organization that operates programs throughout the state of Maine. We provide low-barrier services that empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and we advocate for solutions to these problems.

At Preble Street, we know that we cannot be doing antipoverty work if we are not also engaged in anti-racism work. Housing insecurity and homelessness exist today in part due to our country's legacy of racist housing policies. In every state, African Americans are more likely to experience homelessness than white people, and while Maine is one of the whitest states in the nation, we are not exempt from the disproportionate racial impacts of homelessness.

Recent racial demographic data from ten (10) Preble Street programs corroborate this inequity and show that a high percentage of People of Color access Preble Street services. On average twenty-two percent (22%) of individuals needing to access Preble Street programs are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the people who use Preble Street's Quarantine Shelter, people who are COVID positive or are awaiting the result of a COVID test and need a safe place to quarantine and heal, are Black, Indigenous or People of Color. At Preble Street's small, specialized shelter for homeless youth, thirty-seven percent (37%) of people using the shelter are People of Color. Lastly, in one of our casework programs, Anti-Trafficking Services, twenty five percent (25%) of the clients we serve are People of Color.

I am sharing these statistics because they are one example of why the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations is so vitally important. The need for an independent government entity such as this has never been clearer. The Permanent Commission has the potential to assist policy makers and the public in better understanding and proactively addressing the underlying factors that contribute to racial disparities such as these. However, without funding, the Permanent Commission's important work of addressing systemic racism in Maine will be severely limited due to capacity constraints. This will harm all Mainers, but Mainers of color will disproportionately feel the impacts.

We know that budgets speak; budgets communicate what we believe has value. Our state must use the power of funding to affirm the vital importance of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations. This legislation will provide the Permanent Commission with the funding necessary to secure the dedicated staffing and

administrative support needed to continue this work and to pursue its imperative mission. If we are serious about dismantling systemic racism in our State, we must vote to pass this bill and support the work of the Permanent Commission. Thank you.