

dee Clarke
PORTLAND

Testimony of Dee Clarke

In Support of LD 1034

Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

April 14, 2021

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Dee Clarke and I have the honor of serving as a commissioner on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations. I am testifying in support of LD 1034 on behalf of the Permanent Commission as an Indigenous African American woman who has lived experience with homelessness and housing insecurity.

I have been an advocate for over twenty years with grassroots organizations like Homeless Voices For Justice, and am the founder and executive director of Survivor Speak. Through this work and my experiences as a Indigenous Black, once homeless woman with children, I've seen firsthand how difficult it is to get our government leaders to see us and not the white status quo. The work we do at the Permanent Commission is the first real purposeful effort the state of Maine has had that includes the lived experience of indigenous African Americans, and our tribal sisters and brothers, in guiding policy makers to create policy that actually has a positive effect for the state and ALL of the people.

The Permanent Commission is expected to meet monthly, but with the amount of important work that needed to be done in 2020 and with minimal staff, we are meeting up to five times our expected amount. The Permanent Commission is getting an amount of work referred to us that requires myself and my fellow commissioners to go "beyond volunteering": often working without compensation in order to handle our workload. It is because this work is so vital that we continue to meet and continue our operations, even though we receive no compensation for it. Beyond the fact that we all deserve to be fairly compensated for the work we are doing, these funding issues create instabilities which risk the longevity of our commission and limit our scope to what we otherwise may be able to handle.

LD 1034 seeks to fix these issues and provides crucial funding to the Permanent Commission that allows us to continue on our path of advancing racial, social, and economic justice for all people living in Maine, especially Black, Brown, and indigenous folks. With the passage of LD 1034, we will be able to hire more staff, conduct community outreach, and give our racially disadvantaged individuals a seat at the table.

I have been doing advocacy work for over twenty years here in this great state, but I have never before been so hopeful that real change would be enacted here in Maine. The work we are doing at the Permanent Commission is a piece of a large whole focused on righting the wrongs in this state and around the country; it's for these reasons that I hope you will vote "ought to pass" on LD 1034. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions.