



## **Testimony in Support of LD 1034: An Act To Support the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations**

**April 14, 2021**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Anne Dalton, a member of United Way of Greater Portland's (UWGP) Board of Directors. I submit this written testimony on behalf of UWGP in support of LD 1034, a bill that would provide funding for hiring staff to support the vital work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Maine Tribal Populations.

Established in 2019, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations is charged with the important mission to examine racial disparities across all systems and specifically work to improve the status and outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, indigenous, and tribal populations in the state.

Like other states in the country, Maine has racial disparities. For instance, the data we have indicates that Black/African Americans in Cumberland County are at a distinct disadvantage compared to white people or the general population. For example, we see that:

- (1) the child poverty rate for Black/African Americans is 44% as compared to 11% for all children. (U.S. Census, 2019)
- (2) the high school diploma completion rate for individuals older than 25 is 78% for Black/African Americans but 97% for white individuals. (U.S. Census, 2019)
- (4) the median household income for Black/African American families is \$34,898 while it is \$76,487 for white families. (SAIPE, 2019)

Maine lawmakers cannot change the past, but they can learn from it. Public Policies that have had or may have the effect of discriminating against people of color must be acknowledged and amended if we plan to live and thrive in a state where every person who calls it home has equal economic stability, educational opportunities, and health access.

The Maine Legislature has demonstrated its willingness to make changes by creating and supporting recommendations made by the Permanent Commission. The work of the Permanent Commission is significant, and this work must continue in order to improve the lives of Black Mainers, tribal members, immigrants, and all people of color. We know that legislation can have racist effects even without racist language or intention. It can discriminate against people of color and therefore affect housing, health care, education, economy, transportation, childcare, criminal justice, and more.

The passage of LD 1034 presents a great opportunity for lawmakers. Establishing three new positions within the Permanent Commission will better support legislators in ensuring that all policy proposals prioritize racial equity, and do not inadvertently promote racism, from the time they are drafted to the time they pass the Legislature.

In order to proactively address racial disparities, the Permanent Commission must have staff support needed to continue the work and pursue its imperative mission.

# LIVE UNITED

Thank you for your leadership and service.

