

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

Submitted by Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador and Co-Chair of the Permanent Commission, Maulian Dana

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

It is my honor to be able to lend my voice in support of this important legislation that would make Maine a more equitable, safe, and inclusive place for all of our citizens. I serve as both the Tribal Ambassador of the Penobscot Nation and a Co-Chair of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Maine Tribal Populations. I also serve as the Co-Chair of the Maine Climate Council Subcommittee on Equity. I have had the honor of being steeped in the work of racial equity and justice in my various roles and this knowledge and experience grounds me in my wholehearted support for this bill.

You will hear from many commissioners and supporters about why the Permanent Commission needs to continue the work we have undertaken and why that work necessitates adequate funding. The commission is a unique body that has the potential to improve the lives, outcomes, and environment for not only the communities that are reflected in the makeup of the commissioners but for all of Maine. When we hold space for the most vulnerable and marginalized it benefits our whole society.

Prior to contact there were upwards of 20 distinct tribal nations in the land now called Maine. Now 4 tribes remain in 5 nations. The sheer loss of life, land, resources, culture, and identity that our people have endured in the years during and since the initial colonization and genocide attempt leaves a legacy of trauma and oppression that we are doing our best to heal from. Part of that healing is not only an acknowledgement of this history and how it affects the tribes today but also a commitment to true equity and sovereignty. The work of the Permanent Commission is a key factor in this journey.

The tribal commissioners were able to participate in the work last summer looking at legislation and analyzing the bills as they pertain to the work of the commission. It was very hopeful work for us as we were able to lead discussions with tribal sovereignty as a priority. The tribal state relationship has been strained for decades, maybe even generations, and the only way to walk forward together is with mutual understanding and respect. This work will benefit both sides in the ongoing rebuilding of the tribal state relationship.

All of the segments of the population of our state that are represented in this commission have their own histories, needs, goals, and priorities. Even the tribal nations are all unique from one another. The commission is a way to unite on shared issues while elevating the respective stories that need to be told. We are stronger together and Maine is stronger when we are heard and validated. This work cannot be accomplished without staff and funding and Maine has a chance to put resources into an entity that will continue to offer necessary insight and process around issues of race and justice.

I urge you to vote ought to pass and I also urge you to listen with open hearts and minds to my fellow commissioners and those who come to support this bill today. My ancestors were silenced and oppressed in their homelands but they remained and sacrificed so that I could be here to share with you today. I stand on their shoulders and I owe it to them to help to bring about new beginnings and true equality for my people and all people who have suffered.

Respectfully Submitted,
Maulian Dana