

Testimony for the 130th Session of the Maine Legislature

Joint Committee On State and Local Government

Testimony in favor of LD 1034

An Act to Provide Funding to Support the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations.

Public Hearing, April 14, 2021

Chairpersons Senator Baldacci and Representative Matlack, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee On State and Local Government, my name is Carter Friend and I live in Portland. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Anti-Racist Policy Committee of the HopeGateWay Church in Portland.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations (Commission) was formed in 2019 at a critical time for our state and local communities. The events of the past year have brought national focus on the deep and longstanding systemic racism that exists in every aspect of our society – from criminal justice and income, to health care, education, housing and beyond. As the Commission said, this system of oppression has created deep disparities in the lives of racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations compared to their white counterparts. A recent and vivid example of this is the disproportionate rate at which black people have experienced covid in Maine during the pandemic.

To eliminate systemic racism, we must understand what policies and practices are at its roots, and we must adopt anti-racist policies and practices to change them. The Commission has been created to do precisely this. And it has already demonstrated its effectiveness. With only temporary staffing, the Commission analyzed hundreds of bills that remained before the 129th Legislature and, in 2020, issued its first report with specific recommendations for change. Many of the recommendations from that report are being considered by the current Legislature.

It is imperative that this essential work receive the resources it needs to be successful. The work is complex and requires resources to support research, preparation of reports, public engagement and other activities, as well as staff support and stipends for Commissioners. In other words, the resources that are necessary for the Commission to carry out its mandate of examining racial disparities across all systems and working at improving the status and outcomes for the historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the State.

We hope that you will vote in favor of this bill and take this important step to eliminate systemic racism. Thank you.

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