



**Testimony of Richard A. Hooks Wayman  
President & CEO for Volunteers of America Northern New England**

**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  
4/6/2021**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and esteemed members of the State and Local Government Committee:

My name is Richard Hooks Wayman, and I am testifying in support of LD 1034 on behalf of Volunteers of America Northern New England (VOA). VOA is a statewide nonprofit and faith-based organization dedicated to serving those in need. I serve as the President & CEO of VOA, and I reside in Portland. Our administrative offices are in Brunswick, but VOA offers nearly 30 different housing and social service programs across twelve communities and seven counties in Maine. VOA is proud to offer high-quality housing and services to keep older Mainers and persons with disabilities in their communities. We are also well known for our work in supporting U.S. veterans experiencing homelessness and for improving public safety through our community justice reentry services.

As a mission-drive organization, VOA was founded on the principle of the sacred worth and dignity of all persons. However, VOA is aware of its failure to always be a voice for inclusion and equity in society and to acknowledge our historical white privilege. Due to our ministry of service to others, we are committed to advancing social, racial, and economic justice to ensure that all members of our communities have the resources to reach their full potential and lead lives of self-determination.

In response to our desire to contribute to a deeper understanding of the modern outcomes of systemic racism and colonization in Maine, VOA secured an award from National VOA of \$50,000. In 2020 we decided to contribute this fund to the Permanent Commission. We hired and assigned a full-time Research Associate to the Permanent Commission to bolster their work to identify data, research, and best practices in ameliorating structural racism across public systems. We were also heartened to hear that Governor Mills had also contributed funding to the work of the Permanent Commission during this past year.

As this Committee is aware, The Permanent Commission was formed in 2019 to examine racial disparities across all systems and improve outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, indigenous and tribal populations in the State. It is uniquely structured to conduct research, advise all three branches of government, submit its own legislation, and hold public hearings. However, the Commission lacks adequate funding to function properly. The Commission has produced initial findings and policy recommendations, but consistent and sustained funding is necessary to identify policy reforms and assist our state in achieving better health, economic, and educational outcomes for communities of color.

As a housing and social service organization with nearly 30 programs in Maine, we witness the impact of racial disparities on the people we serve. Disparities in access and outcomes exist across multiple state systems of care including healthcare, housing, criminal justice, employment/labor, wealth, child welfare, juvenile justice, behavioral health, public education, and higher education. Being intentional in our approach to addressing racial disparities is complicated. Volunteers alone cannot sustain the necessary work. The Commission as it

currently is structured, runs on the goodwill and donated time of its volunteer Commissioners, all of whom have other jobs. Professional and dedicated staff is required, and our state should contribute long-term funding to this work in the interest of achieving improved lives for all of our citizens.

VOA has been financially contributing to the work of the Permanent Commission over the past year, but our national award was for one year and cannot be renewed. While the Commission could explore other philanthropic funding opportunities, VOA is not aware of any state or regional foundation that could adequately sustain the work of the Commission. We encourage this Committee and the State to show its commitment to justice and community well-being by contributing funding for staffing to the Permanent Commission.

Thank you for considering my remarks in support of LD 1034. I'm happy to answer your questions. Thank you for your public services to the citizens of Maine.