

Testimony of Vice Chief Darrell Newell, Passamaquoddy Tribe

In Support of LD 1034

Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

APRIL14, 2021

Greetings Committee Chairs Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlock and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. My name is Darrell Newell, I am the Vice Chief of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township and I also have the honor of serving as a commissioner on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations. I sit among true warriors for the State of Maine and its people.

I am honored to be before you to present testimony in support of LD 1034. I have found my work on the Permanent Commission--collaborating with such diverse members of our Maine Community--to be extremely productive and rewarding. The Commission has accomplished much in the few short months since its founding. It has established itself and has risen to a level of recognition and reliability. It is now capable to assist the State Government in identifying its shortfalls and inadequacies in addressing systemically imposed disparities among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations of our state. The Commission has accomplished much with limited financial resources.

The Permanent Commission has established subcommittees to begin to better address specific problems of various segments of State Government. I sit on the Executive Subcommittee where we are beginning to build working relationships with various agencies in the Executive Branch. The work of this subcommittee will allow the Permanent Commission to play a greater role in informing and amending Maine's administration of policy to improve outcomes for our impacted communities of color. To ensure our success as we embark on this important work, the Permanent Commission needs more funding to develop staff capable of forwarding this mission on a day to day basis.

From a personal Tribal Leadership perspective, Tribal/State relations have always been challenging at best as tribes were considered as "wards of the state" of Maine where the state was postured as a superior oppressor over tribes until our federal recognition in 1976. For a few short years the Passamaquoddy Tribe enjoyed the equal sovereign status of any other federally recognized tribe in the country. We were of a government to government relationship with the State of Maine and the federal government to where all federal Indian law applied to our tribe and we were able to self-govern and to self-determine how better to provide for the needs of our people. Since the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement of 1980 the State has been of special status unlike any other state in the country in tribal/state relations and our tribes have been reduced to mere municipalities and disadvantaged in that any federal Indian laws passed are not applicable to Maine tribes. We have made collaborative efforts with the State of Maine in recent years to restore our sacred tribal sovereignty. I am hopeful for better tribal/state relations.

I feel that the Permanent Commission has great potential in becoming effective in its tasks and responsibilities to assist in the journey of effective, equitable and fair State Government for all of its people. If Maine legislators are serious about dismantling systemic racism in our state, please pass this bill and support the work of the Permanent Commission.