

**Maine Black Community Development 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.**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Shay Stewart-Bouley and I live in Portland. I am here today on behalf of Maine Black Community Development 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.** Thank you all for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Maine Black Community Development is a Portland-based non-profit whose mission is to advance racial, social, and economic justice for all people living in Maine, with a particular focus on improving the quality of life for indigenous Black Mainers.

The Permanent Commission conducts critical research, advises all three levels of the Maine State government, and submits its own legislation, all in the name of racial, Indigenous, and tribal justice and equity. As an organization focused on racial equity, Maine Black Community Development *strongly* supports the Permanent Commission and their work.

The need for a quasi-independent entity such as the Permanent Commission has never been more apparent. Maine, like the rest of the country, has a long history of racial injustices which Mainers now are struggling to reconcile. The Permanent Commission can assist policymakers and the public to better understand and address these injustices. The establishment of this commission sends a positive message to communities of color with the acknowledgment of Maine's racist past. Building strong partnerships with leaders in black and brown communities should be a priority for everyone. Now is the time for Black Mainers to be seen and heard with *a seat at the table*. Black Mainers must be *empowered* to build strong communities of support. The Permanent Commission represents a positive and necessary step forward and allows us opportunities to better focus our efforts on policies that promote liberty and justice for all.

On behalf of Maine Black Community Development, I implore members of the Committee to vote to pass this crucial legislation, not just to better our understanding of racial inequities in this state, but to better our *responses* to these inequities. I thank each and every one of you for your time and consideration on this bill.