



Committee on State and Local Government

LD 1667 - An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the State

February 6, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Respected Members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Gia Drew, and my pronouns are she/her. I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been representing and advocating for Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984, and I am testifying today on behalf of EqualityMaine in support of **LD 1667 - An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the State.**

Maine has been addressing the issue of offensive place names for nearly fifty years. While our state has been on the forefront of such efforts, even making national headlines,¹ offensive and problematic terms still remain attached to Maine's landscape features and maps. The establishment of the State Names Authority and the State Names Advisory Board would be an effective, representative, and thoughtful mechanism for the goal of dismantling racism in our state. The LGBTQ+ community in Maine includes Black and Brown folks, as well and Indigenous Two Spirit people as well. Offensive and racist names hurt our friends, our community members and their families.

Despite some claims that offensive names are "just words," scientific evidence shows that being a target of derogatory language is linked to physical and mental health issues, psychosocial and behavioral problems, including alcohol and drug use among youth, and higher risk of suicide.² Even those who are not the target of, but more frequently witness

¹ "Background." PCRITP, pcritp.me/PlaceJusticeProject/Background. Accessed 07 Feb. 2024.

² Davis, Jordan P, et al. "Effects of Homophobic Name-Calling and Verbal Sexual Harassment on Substance Use among Young Adults." *Aggressive Behavior*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2021, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8183603/. Accessed 07 Feb. 2024.

derogatory language aimed at a certain community are less willing to have social contact with its members and perceive the language as less offensive and more acceptable.³

In the words of Meadow Dibble, Executive Director of Atlantic Black Box and Project Lead on the Place Justice project for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations, “Who gets memorialized through naming practices and historical markers is a strong indicator of a society's values and its dominant sense of collective identity.”⁴ We urge you to support this bill, and to vote Ought To Pass on LD 1667. Let’s continue the work of reparative actions that reflect our state’s belief in everyone’s inherent dignity and worth.

Thank you,

Gia Drew

she/her

³ Cervone, Carmen, et al. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 1, 28 Dec. 2020, pp. 80–101, doi:10.1177/0261927x20967394.

⁴ 2022, 6 October. “The Permanent Commission’s Place Justice Initiative Seeks to Redress Historical Harms, by Meadow Dibble.” Wabanaki REACH, www.wabanakireach.org/the_permanent_commission_s_place_justice_initiative_seeks_to_redress_historical_harms. Accessed 07 Feb. 2024.