

Sam Plasencia
Portland
LD 1667

As a professor of early America with a specialty in early Black histories, and a member of Colby College's Critical Indigenous Studies Initiative, I want to strongly encourage this committee to accept the amendment to the bill LD 1667, to Change Place Names in the state.

Our state maps currently contain many racial and ethnic slurs, derogatory words, and otherwise problematic names attached to places, yet the current official process in Maine for addressing them is unclear and cumbersome. This means that when citizens look at our current state maps or when educators teach the map to children, they are cognitively and emotionally taking in slurs and derogatory speech. Put differently: our current maps normalize hurtful terminology and in so doing, they obscure (at best) or validate (at worst) the violent histories that led to those place names and to those slurs, including but not reducible to scalping, land theft, forced removal, and broken treaties. Both these effects reproduce historical harms.

This amendment provides the pathway for addressing the ongoing erasure of Native people and American colonial wrongdoing by creating a Maine Board on Place Names, in keeping with other states's State Names Authority (SNA) boards. This amendment is also in keeping with efforts already happening within the state, such as the Plan for Penobscot Language Signage on the University of Maine Campus, which began in 2018.

Please take this small step towards reparative action so that we may collectively shape a less harmful and more respectful future. Thank you.