



# Maine Human Rights Commission

# 51 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0051

Physical location: 19 Union Street, Augusta, ME 04330  
Phone (207) 624-6290 ▪ Fax (207) 624-8729 ▪ TTY: Maine Relay 711  
[www.maine.gov/mhrc](http://www.maine.gov/mhrc)

**Kit Thomson Crossman**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**Barbara Archer Hirsch**  
COMMISSION COUNSEL

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Joseph Baldacci, Senate Chair  
The Honorable Suzanne Salisbury, House Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

*Re: An Act Regarding Recommendations For Changing Place Names In The State - LD 247*

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Members of the Committee on State and Local Government:

The Maine Human Rights Commission (“Commission”) is Maine’s quasi-independent, nonpartisan State agency charged with enforcing our state anti-discrimination law, the Maine Human Rights Act, 5 M.R.S. §§ 4551, *et seq.* (“MHRA”). The Commission is statutorily charged with the duties of: investigating, conciliating, and at times litigating protected-class discrimination cases under the MHRA; promulgating rules and regulations to effectuate the Act; and making recommendations for further legislation or executive action concerning infringements on human rights in Maine. 5 M.R.S. § 4566(7), (11). With these duties in mind, the Commission is pleased to offer this testimony in support of LD 247.

Specific to LD 247, the Commission is the venue where any person may file a complaint based on the belief that a place name is offensive. As defined under the MHRA and 1 M.R.S. § 1101, “place” means any natural geographic feature or any street, alley or other road within the jurisdiction of the State, or any political subdivision of the State,” and “offensive name” means “a name of a place that includes [t]he designation ‘n\*\*\*\*\*’ or ‘sq\*\*\*\*’ or any derivation of ‘sq\*\*\*\*’ as a separate word or as part of a word or phrase; or [t]he designation ‘sq\*\*’ or any derivation of ‘sq\*\*’ as a separate word or as a separate syllable in a word.”


The responsibility for investigating these complaints has lain with the Commission since 1979, and we wholeheartedly support this effort to strengthen the MHRA’s protections. While we offer this testimony in support of the bill, we also offer the following two minor amendments:

- 1) With regard to Section 1-A, the Commission recommends giving municipal officers or county commissioners 10 days from the date the Commission sends its statement of findings letter after a vote by the Commissioners finding that a place name is offensive. This clarifies when the Commission has officially made such a finding (i.e., when the statement of findings is sent to the parties) and gives the parties a slightly longer time frame to notify the Maine Board on Place Names, to account for delays in the mail.
- 2) In that same section, municipal officers and county commissioners are directed to follow the process established by the Maine Board on Place Names (“the Board”) pursuant to Title 5 § 1997. We would recommend exempting parties in offensive name cases from the Commission’s post-finding

conciliation process and sending them directly to the Board, to avoid duplicative work on the part of the Commission and the Board.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony about LD 247. The Commission would be pleased to discuss these issues with you at your convenience, including at the work session on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Crossman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent vertical stroke at the beginning.

Kit Thomson Crossman, Executive Director

Cc: Commissioners