



COALITION ON RACIAL EQUITY

Testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 221, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2021, June 30, 2022 and June 30, 2023

May 20, 2021

Dear Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs,

The Coalition on Racial Equity is reaching out today **Neither For Nor Against** the portion of the Governor's proposed biennial budget relating to the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations.

CORE is a group of Maine organizations committed to advancing racial equity and justice in Maine through legislative education and training, and through advocacy and government accountability. Its members are the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine, the Maine Chapter of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Health Equity Alliance, the League of Women Voters of Maine, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, Maine Equal Justice, Maine Initiatives, Maine People's Alliance, Maine Women's Lobby, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

Governor Mills has proposed a budget which includes annual funding of about \$500,000/year for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations. We thank Governor Mills for her inclusion of funding for priorities related to racial justice.

That said, the Commission is seeking additional funding and the members of CORE request that the Legislature work with members of the Commission on a revised budget proposal. We recognize that the Commission is new, and that in many cases newer Commissions are not funded in this manner. However, the Commission is new because racial equity and justice have so long been overlooked as priorities worthy of meaningful systemic change – and the requisite meaningful investment. The Commission is a valuable vehicle with the potential to help Maine grapple with and address its centuries-long history of racism and colonization. But that potential can only be realized with adequate resources.

The Commission currently operates almost entirely on the donated time, labor, and expertise of volunteer members, and occasional temporary support from legislative staff. Even so, in only two years the Commission has been able to create tools which have been referenced and utilized by legislators, state officials, and advocates. A number of bills have been proposed this session – and in some cases already passed and signed into law – which anticipate the support

of the Commission and its members. Consistent and meaningful funding will allow the Commission to hire staff, conduct research, develop policy tools, and support essential overhead functions. This investment will be an investment in the continued availability and expansion of the work upon which we have all come to rely.

The last year has opened many eyes to what was already clear to so many: there are serious racial disparities in public health, criminal justice response, economic security, and virtually every other aspect of life for Black, brown, Indigenous communities, and communities of color in Maine. This is the result of centuries of colonialism, racism, and specific policy choices. Fully funding the Commission's request is a powerful step forward to build more equitable policies and systems in Maine and supporting the Commission to fulfill its mission of creating and improving opportunities and eliminating disparities in the State.

We hope you will support fully funding for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.