

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST REGULAR SESSION-2025

Legislative Document

No. 247

S.P. 113

In Senate, January 21, 2025

An Act Regarding Recommendations for Changing Place Names in the State

Reference to the Committee on Judiciary suggested and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D M Grant'.

DAREK M. GRANT
Secretary of the Senate

Presented by Senator TALBOT ROSS of Cumberland.

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 1 MRSA §1101, sub-§2**, as enacted by PL 1977, c. 259, §1, is amended to
3 read:

4 **2. Place.** "Place" means any natural geographic feature ~~or of the State~~; any square,
5 bridge, tunnel or street, alley or other road within the jurisdiction of the State, or; any
6 political subdivision of the State; or a building, facility, park or cultural feature owned,
7 leased or operated by the State or any political subdivision of the State.

8 **Sec. 2. 1 MRSA §1104**, as amended by PL 1999, c. 613, §2 and PL 2011, c. 657,
9 Pt. W, §6, is further amended to read:

10 **§1104. Responsibility of municipal officers and county commissioners**

11 The municipal officers of the municipality or the county commissioners responsible
12 for the unorganized territory, in which a place is found by the Maine Human Rights
13 Commission pursuant to Title 5, section 4632; to have an offensive name, shall ~~have the~~
14 ~~following responsibilities:~~

15 **1. Reasonable actions.** ~~They shall take~~ Take whatever reasonable actions are required
16 to complete a change in the offensive name. ~~They including, but not limited to, petitioning~~
17 ~~and engaging the Maine Board on Place Names under Title 5, section 1997, and may hold~~
18 ~~public hearings on selecting a new name; and~~

19 **1-A. Consult with Maine Board on Place Names.** Notify the Maine Board on Place
20 Names under Title 5, section 1997 within 5 days of the Maine Human Rights Commission
21 finding that the place has an offensive name and shall follow the process established by the
22 Maine Board on Place Names pursuant to Title 5, section 1997; and

23 **2. Notification.** Unless a court order is issued under Title 5, section 4632 specifying
24 a different deadline, within 6 months of the ~~determination~~ finding by the Maine Human
25 Rights Commission that the place has an offensive name, ~~they shall~~ provide notice of the
26 new name to ~~the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the Secretary~~
27 ~~of the United States Department Secretary of the Interior and other public agencies, boards,~~
28 ~~committees or other groups responsible for changing names of places and for ensuring that~~
29 ~~such~~ the name changes appear on maps and other public documents.

30 **Sec. 3. 5 MRSA §1997** is enacted to read:

31 **§1997. Maine Board on Place Names**

32 **1. Established.** The Maine Board on Place Names, established by section 12004-I,
33 subsection 75-D and referred to in this section as "the board," shall establish policies and
34 procedures for naming and renaming places in the State and shall serve as an advisor to
35 local units of government seeking to name or rename a place and to the Department of
36 Administrative and Financial Services' unofficial liaison to the United States Department
37 of the Interior, United States Geological Survey, United States Board on Geographic
38 Names, referred to in this section as "the Board on Geographic Names," who communicates
39 recommendations for naming or renaming places. For purposes of this section, "place" has
40 the same meaning as in Title 1, section 1101, subsection 2.

41 **2. Members.** The board consists of 11 members as follows:

- 1 A. One member who is a faculty member of a college or university in the State
2 specializing in genealogical or anthropological research, appointed by the President of
3 the Senate;
- 4 B. One member recommended by the chief of a federally recognized Indian tribe,
5 nation or band located in the State, appointed by the President of the Senate;
- 6 C. One member who is a faculty member of a college or university in the State
7 specializing in the history, culture or civil and human rights of historically
8 disadvantaged racial, indigenous and tribal populations, appointed by the President of
9 the Senate;
- 10 D. One member who is a scholar of linguistics or a person familiar with language
11 preservation, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- 12 E. One member recommended by the coordinator of special collections at the
13 University of Southern Maine, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- 14 F. One member of a statewide organization based in the State promoting civil rights
15 that has racial justice or racial equity as its primary mission, appointed by the Speaker
16 of the House;
- 17 G. One member recommended by the chief of a federally recognized Indian tribe,
18 nation or band located in the State who is not from the same tribal community as the
19 member appointed pursuant to paragraph B, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- 20 H. One member who is an employee of the Office of Geographic Information Systems
21 within the Office of Information Technology and who serves as the unofficial liaison
22 to the Board on Geographic Names and who is a mapping professional, recommended
23 by the Chief Information Officer;
- 24 I. The State Archivist or the State Archivist's designee;
- 25 J. The State Geologist or the State Geologist's designee; and
- 26 K. The State Historian or the State Historian's designee.

27 In appointing members of the board, the appointing authorities shall give consideration to
28 racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic and geographic diversity.

29 **3. Chair.** The chair of the board must be selected from among its members at the first
30 meeting of the board each year. The chair shall call and preside at meetings of the board
31 and shall perform such other duties as the board may assign. If a chair is no longer willing
32 or able to serve, the board shall select a chair from among its members at the next meeting
33 of the board.

34 **4. Terms; vacancy; quorum.** Members of the board serve 2-year terms and continue
35 servng until either reappointed or replaced. In case of the termination of a member's
36 service during that member's term, the appointing authority shall appoint a successor for
37 the unexpired term. A majority of members constitutes a quorum for the purpose of
38 conducting the business of the board.

39 **5. Duties.** The board shall:

- 40 A. Meet on a regular basis at least 6 times per year;

1 B. Advise the member of the board serving as the State’s unofficial liaison to the Board
2 on Geographic Names pursuant to subsection 2, paragraph H;

3 C. Develop, oversee and make public policies and procedures for petitioning the board
4 to name or rename a place and for filing a petition with the Board on Geographic
5 Names, Domestic Names Committee;

6 D. Develop and implement a public engagement campaign to raise awareness about
7 place names, their history and the public process by which place names are chosen;

8 E. Give notice to the Board of Geographic Names, Domestic Names Committee of
9 scheduled board meetings; and

10 F. Recommend policies and procedures for a petitioner to use to solicit input on
11 petitions to name or rename a place, which may include:

12 (1) Public engagement through advertised public presentations;

13 (2) Outreach to solicit public input through local populations;

14 (3) Public outreach to nonlocal populations;

15 (4) Educational materials that are made readily available to the public;

16 (5) Appropriate time and options for a dedicated public comment period; and

17 (6) Recorded public voting administered by the election official in the affected
18 local unit of government where there is a request for the naming or renaming of a
19 place.

20 **6. Additional responsibilities.** The board may take on the following additional
21 responsibilities as resources allow:

22 A. Acting as a liaison with state and federal agencies and the governments of Indian
23 tribes, nations and bands in the State to ensure consistency in data and mapping
24 products;

25 B. Developing recommendations on best practices in naming or renaming places;

26 C. Sustaining active membership in a national nonprofit association of state and federal
27 government agencies representing the official and recognized geographic names
28 authorities in the United States that work to promote national standardization of the
29 names of geographic features for official use throughout the country; and

30 D. Issuing recommendations on petitions to name or rename a place.

31 **7. Compensation.** Board members not otherwise compensated for serving on the board
32 by their employers or other entities that they represent are eligible to receive a legislative
33 per diem, as defined in section 12002, subsection 3, in accordance with section 12002-B.

34 Board members may be compensated only for up to 4 meetings per month.

35 Nothing in this subsection is intended to exempt members of the board from the provisions
36 of section 18-A.

37 **8. Funding.** The board may receive and accept, from any source, allocations,
38 appropriations, loans, grants and contributions of money or other things of value to be held,
39 used or applied to carry out this section, subject to the conditions upon which the loans,
40 grants and contributions may be made, including, but not limited to, appropriations,

1 allocations, loans, grants or gifts from a private source, federal agency or governmental
2 subdivision of the State or its agencies to name or rename a place.

3 The board may receive and disburse funds made available to it for education programs,
4 assisting the public in understanding the history of place names and providing local
5 assistance on initiating a petition to the board to name or rename a place.

6 **9. Staffing.** The board may employ personnel as it considers necessary and desirable
7 in order to effectively discharge its duties and responsibilities.

8 **10. Reporting.** By December 15th of each odd-numbered year, the board shall submit
9 a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and
10 local government matters, the joint standing committee of the Legislature having
11 jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters and the joint standing
12 committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over inland fisheries and wildlife matters.
13 The report must include a list of local units of government that have petitioned to name or
14 rename a place, the status and outcome of each petition, recommendations for changes to
15 existing place names and recommendations for suggested legislation to improve the process
16 of naming or renaming a place. Each committee may report out legislation in the regular
17 or special session of the biennium in which the committee receives the report.

18 **Sec. 4. 5 MRSA §12004-I, sub-§75-D** is enacted to read:

19 **75-D.**

20 <u>State</u>	<u>Maine Board on Place Names</u>	<u>Legislative Per</u>	<u>5 MRSA</u>
21 <u>Government</u>		<u>Diem for Certain</u>	<u>§1997</u>
22		<u>Members</u>	

23 **Sec. 5. Staggered terms.** Notwithstanding the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5,
24 section 1997, subsection 4, initial appointments to the Maine Board on Place Names must
25 be staggered as follows:

26 1. Of the members appointed by the President of the Senate, one member must be
27 appointed for a one-year term and 2 members must be appointed for 2-year terms; and

28 2. Of the members appointed by the Speaker of the House, 2 members must be
29 appointed for one-year terms and 2 members must be appointed for 2-year terms.

30 **Sec. 6. Moratorium on requests to Board on Geographic Names for naming**
31 **or renaming of nonadministrative places.** For a period of 180 days after the effective
32 date of this legislation, the Department of Administrative and Financial Services may not
33 process or act upon any petitions to the United States Department of the Interior, United
34 States Geological Survey, United States Board on Geographic Names for the naming or
35 renaming of a natural geographic feature of the State or any square, bridge, tunnel or street,
36 alley or other road within the jurisdiction of the State.

37 **SUMMARY**

38 This bill establishes the Maine Board on Place Names as an advisory board and it
39 requires the board to establish policies and procedures for naming and renaming places. It
40 requires the Maine Board on Place Names to serve as a consultant to the state employee
41 who serves as an unofficial liaison to the United States Department of the Interior, United
42 States Geographical Survey, United States Board on Geographic Names, Domestic Names

1 Committee for the purpose of naming and renaming those places in the State under the
2 jurisdiction of the United States Board on Geographic Names.

3 The bill also requires municipal officers and county commissioners to notify and work
4 with the Maine Board on Place Names if a place name in a municipality or unorganized
5 territory is found by the Maine Human Rights Commission to be offensive. It requires the
6 Maine Board on Place Names to submit a report, by December 15th of each odd-numbered
7 year, to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over state and
8 local government matters, the joint standing committee of the Legislature having
9 jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters and the joint standing
10 committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over inland fisheries and wildlife matters
11 regarding municipalities that have petitioned to name or rename a place, recommendations
12 for changes to existing place names and recommendations for suggested legislation.

13 Finally, the bill amends the definition of "place" in the provision of law that prohibits
14 offensive names for places in the State.