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Annual Report

of the

**PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF
RACIAL, INDIGENOUS, AND TRIBAL POPULATIONS**



A Report to the
Maine Legislature,
Governor, and the
People of Maine



**Permanent
Commission**
RACIAL, INDIGENOUS
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS

JANUARY 2025

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Letter from the Executive Director

On behalf of Commissioners and staff, I am pleased to share the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations' annual report, pursuant to 5 MRSA §25007(1)(C). The Permanent Commission was established in 2019 as a bold step toward addressing the deep-rooted disparities caused by systemic racism in Maine.

The Permanent Commission recognizes that our state's history, like our country's, is marked by the exploitation of the land and labor of Indigenous people, Black people, and immigrant communities. This legacy continues to shape our present, manifesting in unequal outcomes in housing, income, education, health, and in nearly every aspect of daily life. At the most basic level, that's what systemic racism means. The systems we have today are the product of our past, but our future will be determined by what we do together in the present.

Dismantling systemic racism requires intentional action. It's about understanding and acknowledging the historical context of our institutions and policies, and working to transform them so they serve all Maine people well. We are working to build bridges between state government and communities who have experienced generations of harm, centering their knowledge and priorities.

We center community: We believe that those most impacted by injustice must be at the forefront of change – to quote late Commissioner dee Clarke, “nothing about us, without us.”

We are data-driven and story-informed: We use both quantitative data and qualitative stories of lived experience to illuminate the complex reality of systemic racism.

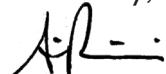
We collaborate and build partnerships: We work with institutions and communities to build collective power and create lasting solutions.

We are honest about hard history: We acknowledge the painful truths of our past and work toward a future rooted in healing and justice.

We promote liberty and justice for all: We believe that addressing racial injustice benefits everyone, reinforcing our freedoms and creating a stronger and more vibrant Maine for all.

The Permanent Commission envisions a Maine where all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or background, have the opportunity to thrive – a Maine where our systems and institutions are just and equal, and where everyone has the dignity, resources, and self-determination to live a fulfilling life. This is the future we are working toward, together.

In Solidarity,



Ariel Ricci, Executive Director

What is Racism? Definitions and Examples

Racism can be defined as a set of theories and beliefs that establishes a hierarchy of races and ethnicities, based on misconceptions and stereotypes. Racism is a form of discrimination founded on the ethnic or racial background of the victim. Racism can be held in several forms; including systemic, structural, institutional, or individual and may not involve individuals acting with racist intent for racist outcomes to be perpetuated (see Figure 1).¹ The following definitions appear in ascending order of how embedded the forms are in law.

Individual Racism

Racism that occurs between individuals. It is the racial assumptions, prejudices, and discrimination expressed through interactions between people. This can include overt actions such as racial slurs and physical attacks, as well as subtle behaviors such as exclusion and microaggressions.

Example: A Black family looking to buy a home is not shown houses in a predominantly white neighborhood because their realtor “doesn’t think they’d fit in” in that community.

Structural Racism

Social structures are the processes, interactions, and relationships that govern how people are connected to one another – including through our language, values, laws, forms of exchange, and knowledge creation. Structural racism refers to the ways in which racial injustices are embedded in the ideas, language, hierarchies, and stories we tell about our society.

Example: Black families in America have significantly less wealth than white families as a result of long histories of slavery and land theft that were part of American expansion.

Institutional Racism

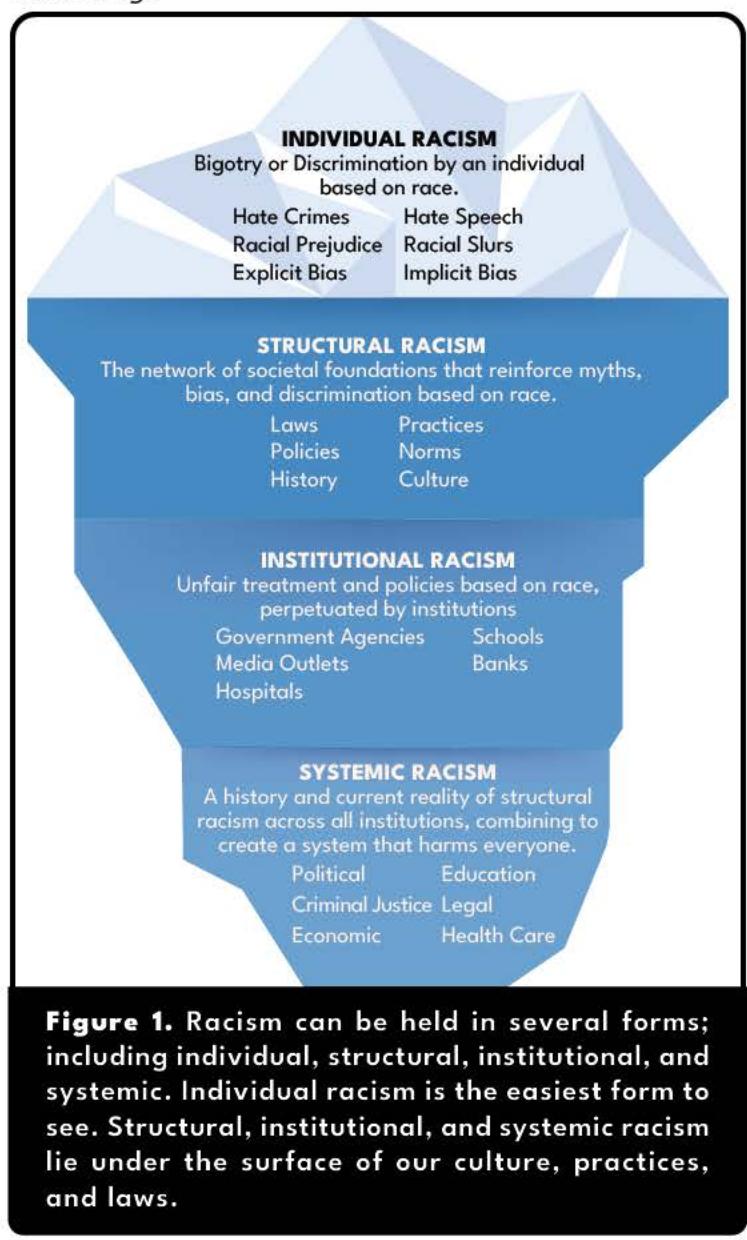
Social institutions are the organizations or entities that meet the needs of and reproduce the norms and expectations of society. Examples of social institutions include family, government, religion, economy, and education.² Institutional racism refers to unfair treatment within and across these social institutions that, intentionally or not, produce outcomes that chronically favor or put a racial group at a disadvantage.

Example: A mortgage company has a policy which allows them to use an AI algorithm to approve and deny home loans on the basis of historic data, which denies loans disproportionately to Black applicants who are historically less likely to have stable income and financing for down-payments.

Systemic Racism

Social systems are networks of institutions which cut across specific areas or domains. Systemic racism refers to forms of racism that result from the intersections between different institutional domains that maintain and reinforce racial disparities and result in worse outcomes for most people.

Example: Because Black Americans have less access to intergenerational wealth, they have less access to education, which has resulted in lower income, leaving them locked into cycles of poverty and less able to reliably afford basic necessities like housing.



¹ Adapted from: Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School.

² Adapted from: Drew, C. (June 23, 2023). Social Institutions in Sociology (Definition and Explanation).

Building the Permanent Commission

A Legacy of Disparities, a Vision for Justice

In 2019, the Maine Legislature and Governor Janet Mills took a bold step toward addressing the deep-rooted disparities caused by systemic racism in Maine by establishing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations (the Permanent Commission). It is a 17-seat independent commission with a statutory mission to:

[...] promote, implement and coordinate programs that create and improve opportunities and incorporate the goal of eliminating disparities for historically disadvantaged racial, indigenous and tribal populations in the State.³

The Permanent Commission is **mandated** to:

- Research the status of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.
- Seek public input by conducting public hearings annually.
- Report annually to the Governor and Legislature.

Additionally, the Permanent Commission is **empowered** to:

- Promote and coordinate activities on state and local levels.
- Conduct programs and events to raise public awareness.
- Introduce legislation.
- Advise and consult all three branches of government.

The Permanent Commission received its first ongoing funding in October 2021. Commissioners, staff, partners, and stakeholders have worked collaboratively to establish the Permanent Commission as an independent state agency with research, programming, and community engagement capabilities.

Commission Composition

The Permanent Commission's seventeen Commissioners are appointed by the Governor, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, Wabanaki Nations, or by the Commission itself. Statute states:

To the extent possible, the commission must consist of members who represent the diverse racial, indigenous, and tribal populations in the State.⁴

By design, Commissioners are appointed to represent statewide organizations, interests, and communities that:

- Have knowledge of the challenges facing communities of color.
- Have experience of advocacy.
- Provide leadership in programs or activities that create and improve opportunities.

Commissioners all bring a commitment to racial justice and complex layers of identity, along with significant professional and lived experience. The Commission is mindful that it does not and cannot be representative of the diversity of lived experiences among racial, Indigenous, and tribal communities in Maine. No community or people is a monolith and there are vastly different lived experiences and perspectives both between and within communities.

The Permanent Commission regularly and intentionally reflects on which communities and interests are and are not reflected in its membership. Through its community engagement work, the Permanent Commission seeks to engage authentically with all of Maine's diverse communities, avoid real or perceived tokenization, and build trust and long-term relationships. A current list of Commissioners can be found in Appendix B.

³ 5 MRSA §25001

⁴ 5 MRSA §25002

Committee Structure

Throughout 2024, the Permanent Commission operated with the following Committees, composed of up to six Commissioners and supporting staff:

Research Committee: Considers research needs and opportunities, along with appropriate methodologies for ethical research.

Community Engagement Committee: Develops strategies to engage with diverse communities, often among communities with a historic distrust of state agencies.

Policy Committee: Considers policy issues that the Permanent Commission should weigh in on, based on potential impacts on priority populations.

Finance and Operations Committee: Oversees budget and advises on operations to ensure effective and efficient expenditures.

Staff Structure

The staff of the Permanent Commission includes the Executive Director, the Research Specialist, the Policy Coordinator, the Communications Coordinator, the Community Engagement Specialist, and the Operations Director. In 2024, the Permanent Commission shifted the latter three seats from acting positions to permanent staff.

Budget

In the 2024-2025 state fiscal year, the Permanent Commission's work was funded through a combination of state and federal funds, as shown below.

State General Fund

Personal Services	\$735,016
All Other	\$538,870

Federal funds*

Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan	\$1,000,000
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*One-time funding.

Examining Disparities

Our Approach to Research

The Permanent Commission engages in research that helps the state of Maine to understand and counteract systemic inequalities. How we approach this work and the methods we use to do so are vital to ensuring that our efforts do not reproduce systemic harm.

For us, that means that our research is driven by the needs of marginalized communities, and developed and executed by and for these communities to the extent possible. When we collect data, we use it for good, only for good, and only with the explicit consent of those who have freely offered it. The Permanent Commission also works closely with the Institutional Review Board at the University of Southern Maine to ensure the highest standards of research ethics, and commits to the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP[®])⁵ when working in partnership with our Wabanaki neighbors. We also seek to mitigate risks associated with data collection by:

- Working in partnership with impacted communities to check our assumptions and center their voices.
- Using clear and precise language in the presentation of findings, while being transparent about data limitations.
- Utilizing community peer review processes that allow for the right of refusal by communities about whom the research is speaking for and to.
- Reducing requests for new data where existing data is already available.
- Placing value on qualitative approaches that add richness to our understanding of Maine's cultural and racial diversity.
- Empowering communities to collect data so that it stays where it originates, and deferring to those groups about what is shared, how, and with whom.

Taken together, we hope these efforts bring us closer to modeling just processes in our work, while always acknowledging that research is a process of deep and ongoing learning.

The State of Racial Disparities in Maine

In November 2024, the Permanent Commission released a report on the state of racial disparities in Maine,⁶ compiling research from a broad range of subject areas including housing, wealth and income, environmental issues, health and healthcare, transportation, tribal sovereignty, and more. The report showcases existing areas of racial disparity in Maine and their causes, as well as how different areas of inequality are connected and reinforce each other. For example, the report describes how:

- Disparities in homeownership in Maine are linked to vast inequalities in wealth and income, which have intergenerational consequences. As of 2022, Maine ranked last among states for racial equity in homeownership. Because wealth is strongly tied to homeownership, recent and rapid increases in home values in Maine deepen economic inequalities along racial lines, making it harder for those who don't own homes today to do so in the future.
- Failure to recognize Wabanaki peoples' right to self-determination has significant economic costs for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. From 1990 to 2020, federally recognized tribes across the US grew their per capita income by 61%. Because of limitations stemming from the 1980 Indian Land Claims Settlement Act, citizens of Wabanaki Nations saw only 9% per capita income growth during that same period. That has significant implications for non-Wabanaki communities as well. Today, around 70-90% of jobs supported by tribal economies are held by non-tribal citizens, many of them in rural Maine communities.
- The challenge of modernizing Maine's aging infrastructure falls particularly hard on rural and minority communities. In northern Maine, limited access to broadband and long distances between medical facilities limit access to crucial health resources for Wabanaki people and rural Mainers. In southern Maine, limited rental availability and few public transportation options push people into unstable housing situations, often further from employment opportunities and community support. Today, despite making up less than 2% of Maine's population, nearly 50% of unhoused individuals in Maine are Black.

⁵ The First Nations principles of OCAP[®] establish how First Nations' data and information will be collected, protected, used, or shared. Standing for ownership, control, access and possession, OCAP[®] is a tool to support strong information governance on the path to First Nations data sovereignty. <https://fnigc.ca/ocap-training/>

⁶ The State of Disparities report can be accessed on our website, pcritp.me, under the "resources and reports" tab.

The State of Racial Disparities in Maine Report will be updated on a biannual basis to reflect the most current information and to incorporate new topical areas that may shed more light on systemic injustice in Maine. We hope, over time, to showcase where Maine is making strides toward equity and justice, and continue to identify areas ripe for policy change. We welcome feedback that helps us ensure this research advances those goals in line with the desires and interests of Maine's diverse communities.

Place Justice

In 2022, the Permanent Commission was directed by the Maine State Legislature under PL 2022, Ch 149 to review state law regarding offensive place names. In 2024, the Permanent Commission published findings from this research as an interactive map, outlining the location of place names in Maine falling into four categories:

- “Offensive names” changed by statute;
- Place names containing racial or ethnic slurs;
- Place names containing controversial language; and
- Place names referring to Indigenous or African American individuals.

The Permanent Commission offers this resource as an educational tool to foster improved, data-informed dialogue among Mainers, scholars, and policy-makers about the history and meaning of place names in Maine. We invite communities to learn together about our shared history and engage in open dialogue about its impacts. As a result of this approach, it does not include specific name change recommendations.

Mapping Maine Communities

At the Permanent Commission, we often hear that one of the primary challenges in Maine is knowing who is here, where they are, and what they need. In 2024, our staff took the first step into exploring that question through the creation of an interactive resource, Mapping Maine Communities. This map draws in demographic data from the US Census and American Community Survey, and overlays that data in Maine with a range of additional pieces of information falling into three broad categories.

Physical Infrastructure and Access: Explores the location of critical services, including medical and safety resources, food and retail stores, banks, educational institutions, child and elder care, and outdoor and recreational spaces (see Figure 2).

Climate, Environment, and Hazards: Draws in data layers related to a number of environmental impacts, including the location of petroleum tanks, municipal waste sites, superfund and brownfield sites, and information from FEMA on flood hazard areas and storm surge zones (see Figure 3).

Social Mobility and Livelihoods: Considers factors affecting human well-being, including access to reliable internet, health insurance, food security, social vulnerability, rent burden, and other indicators (see Figure 4).

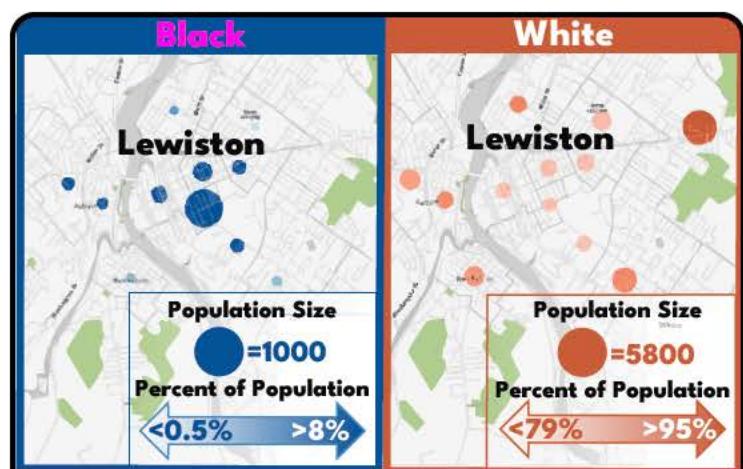


Figure 2. Proximity to green space differs for Lewiston's Black & white communities.

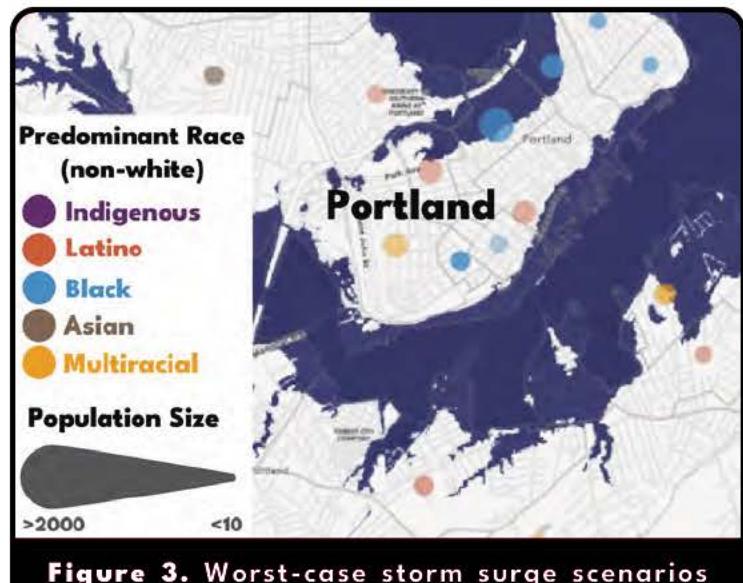


Figure 3. Worst-case storm surge scenarios in Portland pose risks to many communities, especially Black communities.



Figure 4. Passamaquoddy communities in Washington County currently have limited access to broadband.

We are currently offering this interactive resource as a prototype, due to the well-known challenges associated with the disaggregation of census data in states with small minority populations.⁷ In the coming year, we plan to work with researchers to improve these estimates using statistical tools. Until then, we recommend this as a resource for asking questions about Maine's population, rather than seeking definitive answers. We also welcome community and policy-maker feedback on this resource to ensure that it brings added utility to those who can use it to make change toward a more equitable society.

Forthcoming Work

Alongside these resources, the Permanent Commission continues to work on a number of other resources for state agencies, elected officials, and members of the public to be released in 2025.

- A report on the state of restorative justice initiatives in Maine (PL 2021, Ch 101), detailing ongoing restorative justice efforts, as well as the opportunities and challenges of advancing more robust restorative justice programs here in Maine. We anticipate this report will be released early in 2025.

- A report on our work toward data justice, exploring the history of racial data collection by state actors and ongoing tension between the need for data and the risks to marginalized communities from data collection. We anticipate this report will be released in the spring of 2025.
- An interactive dashboard exploring Social Drivers of Health among racial groups in Maine over time and as a comparison between Maine and the national average. Topics explored include economic stability, educational access and quality, health care access, and social and community context. We anticipate this resource will be available in the summer of 2025.
- Haven: Stories of Maine's Housing Crisis, a project intending to bring nuance into our understanding of Maine's ongoing housing crisis. This project will include a report on systemic inequality in housing in Maine and an online repository of housing stories. We anticipate the repository to be available in the summer of 2025 and the report later in the fall.



⁷ For more information, see the Maine State Economists website: <https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/Dashboards/SocioeconomicDatabyRaceEthnicityandTotalPopulation>

Building Trust and Community Connections

The Permanent Commission serves as a bridge between communities and state government by building and maintaining trust, ensuring that marginalized communities are not only heard, but also influential in shaping the way life should be. By engaging communities to understand disparities, we center the knowledge, experiences, and voices of those most impacted. All with the goal of building partnerships that foster resilience, collaboration, and deepening connections – building a stronger, more just Maine.

Listening to Impacted Communities

Over the last year, the Permanent Commission partnered with six community-based organizations across our state to host community consulting events, where we heard directly from racially marginalized communities about their needs and experiences. In 2024, these events included:

- **Presente! Maine**, where we heard from community members about the challenges and concerns faced by the Latino community in southern Maine.
- **Khmer Maine**, where Khmer elders living in the Portland area shared feedback and information about their experiences related to quality of life.
- **Maine Multicultural Center** (in partnership with the Maine Human Rights Commission), where Syrian and Hispanic families shared stories about housing in Bangor.
- **Healthy Acadia**, where people from across the Downeast region explored community assets that contribute to quality of life and barriers to thriving.
- **Ikirezi Multicultural Institute & Count Me In**, where Burundian and Rwandese parents in Lewiston came to share their concerns related to their children's educational experiences and community concerns.
- **Bangor Boys and Girls Club**, where we heard directly from Black youth in high school and college in Maine.

What We Heard

From these meetings, we heard a few consistent points worthy of mention:

Housing: Community members expressed difficulties in finding affordable and safe housing, and were particularly concerned with the condition of their living spaces and their rights as tenants. Participants noted affordability as posing real challenges, named that discriminatory practices by landlords remain common, and noted issues such as going without functioning heat, aging appliances, mold, lead, and other dangerous conditions.

Resource Constraints: Attendees described lack of resources, or lack of connection to available resources, as a key issue. Many named the need for more transportation options so that they could access health care services and attend their appointments. Others emphasized limited access to food, childcare, and employment opportunities, especially in coastal communities.

Race Discrimination and the Workplace: Attendees noted experiences of discrimination based on language and, in some cases, their country of origin. Some people felt taken advantage of by their employers due to their limited understanding of paid leave laws, wage and hour laws, and other relevant workplace protections. This was especially true for seasonal workers, who noted lack of fair wages and paid leave, workplace exploitation, and limited workers' compensation benefits as ongoing barriers.

Education: Attendees reported concerns about students' preparedness for standardized testing, especially for those with limited English language comprehension. Students directly raised that Black or other cultural history was largely excluded from the curriculum, and that there was a need for student-led spaces for youth of color to unpack their day-to-day experiences with subtle and overt racism.

Social Isolation: Participants noted that there was limited access to year round multi-cultural gatherings, resulting in fracturing of communities across Maine and self isolation and loneliness for many within their communities. One participant reported that it is hard to find people outside of their own family to share in their culture.

Findings such as these help us carry out our mission to support and improve opportunities for people struggling to overcome these barriers.

Community Support Initiatives

Through our outreach work, the Permanent Commission seeks to empower people and build relationships between communities and state government. We do this in part through supporting community-based organizations (CBOs) across Maine that are doing critical work to build community, lift people out of poverty, and provide vital services that the state is not able to otherwise provide.

Social Capital Development Grant

In 2024, the Permanent Commission leveraged one-time Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan (MJRP) funding to support grants for CBOs to develop innovative programs that addressed social determinants of health (SDOH), while also fostering stronger community connections. Research shows that these community connections – known as social capital – are significant in defining health outcomes. Communities with stronger social capital see lower rates of cardiovascular disease,⁸ cancer,⁹ and suicide,¹⁰ even when controlling for other social and economic factors. That is why, since the late 1990s, researchers have been calling for greater focus on “social capital interventions to mitigate health problems associated with social determinants.”¹¹ This grant represents a partial answer to that call in Maine.

Following a competitive award process conducted through the summer and fall of 2024, the Permanent Commission selected a total of nine projects for full or partial funding. Some of the funded projects include:

- A project by the Maine Council on Aging to build community connections among Black elders through a photovoice project.
- An initiative through Quality Housing Coalition to build community among mothers in low-income households in York County through shared meals.
- A program from Mano en Mano to support wellness activities for farmworkers and immigrants in Washington County.
- An effort by the YMCA of Southern Maine to expand access to community swimming classes for Black women in Cumberland and York Counties.

Youth Empowerment Mini-award

The Permanent Commission offered one-time awards of up to \$4,500 to four organizations serving Mainers under the age of 25. In addition to their projects, awardees participated in multiple peer learning cohort meetings where they learned about other participating organizations.

Overall, the Youth Empowerment Mini-Award had a significant, positive impact on young people who participated,

fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. For example, the Abbe Museum’s Waponahki Student Art Show provided young Wabanaki artists with a platform to showcase their talent and connect with their cultural heritage (see Figure 5), while IFKA Community Services’ Somali Circles program offered Somali youth a safe space to discuss important issues and develop leadership skills. The Community Organizing Alliance empowered immigrant youth to advocate for their communities, while the Somali Bantu Community Association’s Kashekee Youth Garden Project connected youth with their cultural heritage and agricultural skills (see Figure 6). Through initiatives like these, and others funded by the award, young Mainers were able to connect with their communities, learn and grow as individuals, and develop the skills and confidence they need to become future leaders.



Figure 5. Waponahki Student Art Show
Photo Credit: Abbe Museum

⁸ Kawachi I., Colditz G.A., Ascherio A., Rimm E.B., Giovannucci E., Stampfer M.J. & Willett W.C. (1996) A prospective study of social networks in relation to total mortality and cardiovascular disease in men in the USA. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 50, 245-251.

⁹ Kawachi I., Kennedy B.P., Lochner K. & Prothrow-Stith D. (1997) Social capital, income inequality, and mortality. *American Journal of Public Health* 87, 1491-1498.

¹⁰ Helliwell J.F. (2007) Well-being and social capital: does suicide pose a puzzle? *Social Indicators Research* 81(3), 455-496.

¹¹ Hunter, Bradley D., Brad Neiger, and Joshua West. "The Importance of Addressing Social Determinants of Health at the Local Level: The Case for Social Capital." *Health & Social Care in the Community* 19, no. 5 (2011): 522-30.



Figure 6. Kashekee Youth Garden Project
Photo Credit: Somali Bantu Community Association

Juneteenth Mini-award

The Permanent Commission offered one-time awards of up to \$4,000 to groups organizing Juneteenth celebrations or educational events across the state. Funding supported a variety of events that fostered a sense of community, promoted education and reflection, and celebrated Black history and culture. Maine Inside Out's Lewiston public art festival transformed a space often associated with trauma into one of connection and healing through art and play (see Figure 7). Juneteenth Downeast's commemoration in Ellsworth brought together hundreds of community members to celebrate Black and Indigenous heritage through food, music, and shared experiences (see Figure 8). Bright Star USA's Portland event engaged youth in dialogue about Black history and Juneteenth's significance, fostering connections between Immigrant and African American youth through educational activities and sports. The Third Place's two-day celebration on Fortland Island connected Black and Brown entrepreneurs with the community, promoting health, wellness, and economic opportunities through nature-based activities and networking opportunities. Overall, the Juneteenth Mini-Award created spaces for joy, learning, and connection, honoring the legacy of Juneteenth and uplifting Black communities in Maine.

Our next round of mini-awards will focus specifically on Health and Wellness, designed for CBOs to develop and implement programs to address health and well-being in underserved areas of Maine in ways specific to the needs of communities.



Figure 7. The City that Carries Us
Photo Credit: Maine Inside Out



Figure 8. Juneteenth Downeast
Photo Credit: Juneteenth Downeast

Other Initiatives Supported

Alongside our mini-grant process, the Permanent Commission occasionally funds or is otherwise engaged in additional projects and initiatives within impacted communities. In 2024, this included:

- Support for the Black History Month Community Wellness Fair hosted by Cross Cultural Community Services, focusing on community mental health resources and healing in the wake of the Lewiston shooting.
- Support and staff engagement in Indigenous ceremonies hosted by Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness in numerous Maine detention facilities, with a goal of supporting community healing prior to re-entry.

Working Toward Positive Change

The Permanent Commission is empowered to advise all three branches of Maine government and to raise public awareness. To achieve meaningful, positive change, it is vital that we raise public awareness and understanding of the root causes of racial and economic injustice. Through our work with state and local policymakers, along with community partners, we aim to shift narratives, illuminate often-overlooked parts of our past, and facilitate learning opportunities that encourage Maine people to engage with the difficult history that has shaped our present. By sharing Maine-specific data and stories with the public, policymakers, and other state actors about the realities of racial inequality and economic injustice, and by providing educational resources to guide their understanding, work, and decision-making, we can all work together to create a more just and equitable future.

Education and Training Resources

Sharing our Work

The Permanent Commission's research to examine racial disparities and the community engagement work to understand the needs and experiences of marginalized communities in Maine come together in our work to inform policymakers and the public about what we've learned. The foundational State of Racial Disparities Report and the interactive mapping tool, Mapping Maine Communities, serve as an example.

As the Permanent Commission works to generate more of its own products, including a comprehensive Racial Equity Assessment Toolkit, the State of Racial Disparities report will also provide valuable resources to those learning to consider the broader equity implications of all rule-making and policy change. Coupled with the interactive mapping tool, we will not only be able to inform policy-makers about what we have learned, but be able to support them as they develop new questions and areas for policy development.

These resources also served as the focal point of the Permanent Commission's 2024 Annual Meeting, where staff shared key findings from the report and map to raise public awareness and collect public comments about the state of systemic injustice in Maine. A report on the

public comments received during this meeting is available in Appendix A.

Wabanaki-Maine History

In 2024, the Permanent Commission partnered with Wabanaki REACH to offer free trainings on Wabanaki-Maine history for state employees and elected officials. This initiative allowed us to advance Recommendation 11 from the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, narrowing the divide between policy makers and our Wabanaki neighbors. The purpose of the trainings is to:

- Build understanding among state employees and elected officials about the historical and contemporary context of Wabanaki self-determination.
- Support sustainable culture change within state government by educating state employees and policy makers about Wabanaki-Maine history and allyship with Indigenous communities.
- Explore the practical utility of educational programs for building awareness and shifting practices in state government throughout surveys and open dialogue with state employees.

As part of these trainings, over 70 state employees shared their thoughts and perceptions of Maine's current relationship with Wabanaki Nations in a pre-event survey co-designed by staff at Wabanaki REACH and the Permanent Commission. From this survey, we learned that state employees are acutely aware of the historic distrust between tribes and their agencies, and frequently encounter barriers to their work as a result.

Attendees to these trainings noted the importance of care, compassion, and public service in their own personal orientation toward their work, and approached difficult conversations with curiosity and openness. Preliminary findings from post-event surveys (data collection is currently underway) appear to indicate a strong, positive response to this educational opportunity and desire for additional opportunities for engagement.

90%

of attendees improved their understanding of Maine's relationship with Wabanaki people.¹²

¹² From survey of attendees of the first Wabanaki-Maine History Training for state employees held in March 2024.

Film Screenings

In 2024, the Permanent Commission partnered with the filmmakers of “We Are the Warriors,” Bates College, and the Abbe Museum to host a series of film screenings and panel discussions across the state. The documentary follows the town of Wells, Maine as they grapple with the harmful legacy of their high school’s mascot and the broader issues of cultural appropriation, colonization, and intergenerational trauma. By facilitating these screenings and discussions with Wabanaki community members, the Permanent Commission provided opportunities for Maine people to learn about the often overlooked history that sheds light on the roots of systemic injustice in Maine.

In the winter and spring of 2025, the Permanent Commission plans to host two screenings of “Dawnland,” a documentary about the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as part of our collaboration with Wabanaki REACH to highlight Wabanaki-Maine History.

Maine State Government Collaborations

Ending Hunger by 2030 Working Group

In 2024, the Permanent Commission worked with the Governor’s Office of Policy Innovations and Futures (GOPIF) to advance the recommendations set forth by the Roadmap to Ending Hunger by 2030 report through a working group. This group was composed of state actors from various agencies, legislators, and CBOs supporting food access efforts throughout the state. We shared a goal of outlining the realities of addressing statewide food insecurity in Maine and building relationships for sharing and cultivation of vital resources toward this effort. Staff participated in two primary subcommittees: the Narrative Change Subcommittee and the Equity Subcommittee.

“Ending hunger interrupts generational cycles of harm and trauma and opens doors to opportunity and prosperity for the people, families, and communities of Maine.”¹³

GOPIF, in collaboration with organizations like Full Plates, Full Potential and Maine Food Convergence, will be facilitating several spaces designed to carry the momentum of the working groups into actionable steps and policy change. The Permanent Commission looks forward to staying involved in this work.

Criminal Record Review Committee

The Permanent Commission was invited to provide testimony to the Criminal Record Review Committee

To ensure a just future, Maine must prioritize policies that dismantle racial disparities in the criminal justice system and promote opportunities for our communities to heal.

consequences for people that extend the punitive nature of their involvement with the criminal legal system far beyond their sentence. These collateral consequences impact access to employment, housing, and licensing among many other areas. In supporting policy solutions that limit public access to criminal records through processes like record sealing and expungement for those who qualify, these collateral consequences can be mitigated, creating more opportunities to grow and heal for justice-impacted Mainers and their communities.

Racial Equity in Data Governance

Pursuant to statute, the Permanent Commission advises the Department of Administrative and Financial Services and the Secretary of State’s Office on issues of racial equity related to data governance. In 2024, the Permanent Commission was actively involved in these efforts, including through presentations and workshops with state data stewards, the state’s data inventory analysis, and as part of the working group to draft definitions for key demographic data categories. Staff also worked closely with individuals from the Maine CDC data equity working group and the Office of Population Health Equity to develop a Data Equity Vision and Workplan for the Maine Center for Disease Control Health Equity Advisory Council.

¹³ Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. *Everyone at the Table: Maine’s Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030*.

Appendix A

2024 Annual Meeting Summary and Public Comments

On December 10, 2024, The Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations presented findings from its 2024 State of Racial Disparities Report at its annual meeting.

Staff also introduced the interactive mapping tool, “Mapping Maine Communities,” which visualizes the distribution of disparities and opportunities across the state.

The meeting included interactive polls for community feedback on solutions and policy recommendations, emphasizing the importance of community-led initiatives in addressing racial disparities. We have summarized the responses we received for this report.

Where are you seeing creative solutions to these problems in your community?

Attendees reported that creative solutions to problems in their communities were being led by artists and community organizers. They gave examples of community-led food distribution, support for immigrants and people of color finding employment, community engagement across race and gender, and educational programs for teachers on social justice and equity. Additionally, some respondents mentioned cross-sector partnerships and teen centers as positive solutions.

“community members are convening across race and gender to create solutions.”

How do you envision using these State of Racial Disparities report and Mapping Maine Communities tools?

Respondents envisioned using the State of Racial Disparities report and Mapping Maine Communities tools in a variety of ways, including:

- Sharing the information with their organizations and communities.
- Supporting grant applications and funding requests.
- Informing policy advocacy and legislative testimony.
- Guiding community development and resource allocation.
- Raising awareness and inspiring action to address disparities.
- Targeting interventions and programs to areas with the greatest need.

“This will be helpful when applying for grants to help serve our community.”

Based on what you’ve seen here today, what would you ask of policymakers?

Respondents’ requests to policymakers included: ensuring access to affordable housing, healthcare, and transportation; promoting community inclusion; enacting tribal sovereignty; supporting a basic income program; developing racial and gender impact statements for legislation; allowing full access to federal rights and benefits for Wabanaki Nations; implementing reparations for African Americans; and incorporating inclusive curriculum in schools.

“I would ask them to stop seeing race as a polarizing issue and start looking at it as a unifier.”

Appendix B

Commissioners & Staff

Commissioner	Seat	Appointing Authority
Co-Chair Rachel Talbot Ross	RACIAL JUSTICE: a statewide organization which promotes civil rights and racial justice	President of the Senate
Co-Chair Maulian Bryant James Myall	PENOBCOT: a member of the Penobscot Nation ECONOMIC POLICY: an economic policy or data-centered organization	Penobscot Nation President of the Senate
Deb Ibonwa	PUBLIC BENEFIT POLICY: an organization with expertise in legal and policy matters related to public benefits programs assisting people with low incomes	President of the Senate
Sonja Thomas	HIGHER EDUCATION: a member of a college or university in the state specializing in the history, culture, or civil/ human rights of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations	President of the Senate
Jason Shedlock	LABOR: a member of organized labor	President of the Senate
Amy Winston	CDFI: a representative of a community development financial institution	Speaker of the House
Amanda Comeau	HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS: a housing or homelessness advocacy organization	Speaker of the House
Bruce King	HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED POPULATION: a representative of a historically disadvantaged racial population of the state	Speaker of the House
Sheena Bunnell	IMMIGRANT/ REFUGEE RIGHTS: a representative of an immigrant or refugee rights organization	Speaker of the House
Rev. Kenneth Lewis	FAITH: a member of the faith-based community	Governor
Reginald Parson	YOUTH: a member representing youth	Governor
Vice Chief Richard Silliboy	MI'KMAQ: a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation	Mi'kmaq Nation
Juana Rodriguez-Vazquez	LATINO/ MIGRANT RIGHTS: an organization representing latino and migrant communities	Permanent Commission
Theo Greene	LGBTQ+: a member of the LGBTQ+ community	Permanent Commission

Staff

Ariel Ricci	Executive Director
Leeann Sullivan	Research Specialist
Rae Sage	Policy Coordinator
Morgan Pottle Urquhart	Communications Coordinator
Aaron Hooks Wayman	Operations Director
Billale Fulli	Community Engagement Specialist