

Senator Baldacci, Representative Matlack, and other esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

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My name is Craig Hickman and I live in Winthrop. On behalf of Maine Black Community Development, I Zoom here today to testify in favor of LD 2, An Act To Require the Inclusion of Racial Impact Statements in the Legislative Process. I thank Assistant Majority Leader Talbot Ross and her tireless leadership on issues of justice and for bringing forward this measure. Maine Black Community Development is a non-profit whose mission is to advance racial, social, and economic justice for all people living in Maine with a particular focus on improving the quality of life for indigenous Black Americans. We believe that LD 2 will support intentional lawmaking and help to address structural racism in Maine.

Currently the Maine Black Community Development has focused its work on the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color and in particular the African/American Diaspora community in Maine. Since the pandemic began in the racial, indigenous and Tribal populations have been negatively impacted by the virus more significantly across the country and in Maine. One of the first recorded deaths in Milwaukee, my native city, was a high-school classmate. I've lost an uncle in Connecticut and a cousin in California to COVID. One of my brothers in Ohio is a long hauler. Studies from last summer reported that the 20% of U.S. counties that are predominantly Black accounted for 52% of COVID-19 diagnoses and 58% of COVID-19 deaths nationally. In Maine, Black and African American people were 24 times more likely to have tested positive for the virus than others. Overall, the rate of African American deaths due to COVID-19 is almost two times greater than would be expected based on our percent of Maine's population.

This and other data you have heard prove that the rhizomes of racism move wide and deep beneath our feet in Maine and we must do all that we can to uproot it. We have to name it, to know it, to fix it. Or, as my wise mother was wont to say, we better tell the truth and shame the devil. We know that data is integral to understanding this truth, and crucial to crafting legislation that will affect the most vulnerable Maine communities. Racial impact statements will help prevent the exacerbation of racial disparities through lawmaking by detecting unforeseen and unintended consequences of a proposal and will help inform better public policy for all Maine people.

I humbly urge this committee to recommend LD 2 to the full legislature with a unanimous vote. Thank you and take care of your blessings.