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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of LD 1034. My name is Mary Finn, from Saco, and I represent the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN) as a person of faith committed to our fundamental principle of justice, equity and compassion in all human relations.

In creating the Permanent Commission, the 129th Legislature ordered it 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.” It mandated that the Permanent Commission carry out research, conduct annual public hearings, and report periodically to the Governor and Legislature, further empowering it to submit its own legislation and to advise and consult with all three branches of government.

MUUSAN urges adequate funding of the Permanent Commission so that it can fulfill this very important charge. But the Permanent Commission is still a fledgling organization with no institutional history or infrastructure. This past summer, it proved the enormous value it can add to the legislative process with a lengthy and detailed report analyzing bills then active before the legislature. While functioning with only temporary staff support at that time, it also depended on the collaboration of 55 legislators who volunteered their time and effort.

Replicating this kind of extraordinary effort isn't a sustainable strategy for fulfilling the mission of a Permanent Commission. Without funding for staffing and administrative expenses, the Commission would be largely a shell, symbolic of good intentions, perhaps, but without the ability to effect change.

In bills pending before **this** Legislature, the Permanent Commission is already being asked to study policies on agriculture, land access, and financing as they impact our African-American and Indigenous farmers; to study and propose solutions to disparities in access to prenatal care in the State; and to examine restorative justice. That's the kind of important work the Permanent Commission could and should be doing but cannot do effectively without committed funding.

If we are serious about dismantling racism and other oppressions that have harmed racial, indigenous and tribal populations in our state, we must properly fund this Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Finn