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Statement from the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations on the passage of LD 221 by the Maine Legislature

A bipartisan supermajority of the legislature voted today to provide more than \$900,000 a year in ongoing funding for the work of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations. This is an investment into addressing systemic racism and it's the first of its kind in Maine history. These resources will allow us to build from the ground up the systems that will be required for the Permanent Commission to act as both a think-tank and a driver for community engagement.

While we recognize the historic significance of this investment, \$900,000 a year represents far less than 1% of the state's budget - a state that has had some of the worst racial disparities on record. This small percentage is a reflection of the historic lack of direct investment into racial, indigenous and tribal communities and into eliminating the racial disparities they experience. It seems there is still much work to be done before efforts to increase racial equity make up a greater share of the state's budget.

We will continue to seek funding to go to efforts that eliminate racial disparities in all systems in our state. These efforts will increase equity and inclusion and will benefit all Mainers. We look forward to working with the Governor and Legislature to get to a budget that is vetted with a racial equity lens. We look forward to continual engagement to commit the funding necessary to fulfill our mission. Today's budget vote is an important first step.

Based on the Commission's statutory purpose and scope of work, we requested \$2 million of annual ongoing funding from the State's General Fund. Having received less than half of what we sought, this means that some areas of work will need to continue to wait before they can be fully realized. This could include work in the areas of public engagement, investigation and research, developing policy recommendations, or advising government on legislation, implementation and the enforcement of laws. We regret that it will be our responsibility in the coming year to decide which of these areas is less important than the others. Given the events of 2020, this was a momentous time in the history of this nation and a time for the State of Maine to demonstrate its commitment and leadership with regard to dismantling racism within its systems. The racial, indigenous and tribal populations in Maine deserved no less. We will continue to push for \$2 million a year in ongoing funding.

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