

# 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 2026**

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# From the Co-Chairs

## To the People of Maine –

Even in a moment when division and fear are a daily presence in our communities, we believe in Maine's capacity to choose a different path. We believe in a future where all of us, no matter our race, income, or hometown, have what we need to live full, healthy lives. But reaching that future requires something essential: honesty about how we arrived at the present.

Maine's story, like the story of the United States, is shaped by painful truths. Our systems were built on the stolen land and labor of Wabanaki and Black people, and on the exploitation of generations of immigrant workers whose labor was embraced while their belonging and fair wages were denied. Laws were written to control who could vote, own land, raise families safely, or be recognized as part of our communities. These harms did not end in the past, no matter what many of us may have learned in school. The instinct to look away from history's pain and trauma – to dismiss it as being safely behind us – prevents us from seeing how deeply it continues to shape our lives today. It also prevents us from fully seeing and understanding our neighbors, and from building strong communities across our differences.

But our history also contains glimpses of what is possible when we choose each other with courage and imagination. Across generations, people in Maine and throughout the United States have overcome division to build movements that refused to accept injustice as inevitable. Neighbors have stood together to demand safety, dignity, and freedom, even when the risks were great. That spirit is still alive in Maine today.

The Permanent Commission is working to continue that story. As Maine's independent, nonpartisan agency focused on racial, Indigenous, and tribal justice, our charge is clear: uncover the truth about the systems we inherited, raise awareness about how those systems shape our lives, and help build a stronger, more just Maine for everyone. That means listening deeply, telling the full story, and naming the choices in front of us: not only what has gone wrong, but what is possible when we lead with honesty and care.

We are honored to serve in this role, and we are grateful to every community member, partner, and advocate who continues to imagine and build a Maine where everyone belongs.

In Solidarity,



Maulian Bryant



Amanda Comeau



Bruce King

# From the Executive Director

## **Dear Governor Mills, members of the Legislature, community partners, and neighbors across Maine –**

It is my honor to share the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations' Annual Report. 2025 marked a period of deep listening, careful reflection, and steady progress toward building a future where every community in Maine can thrive.

The Permanent Commission was created because the disparities we see today are not accidental. They were shaped by history, policy, and systems that excluded, harmed, or overlooked many communities. Our mandate is to understand these truths honestly and help Maine imagine and build something better. In 2025, we strengthened our internal foundation, expanded our research tools, deepened statewide partnerships, and showed up consistently with and for communities across Maine.

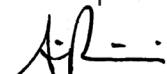
In just five years, the Permanent Commission has grown into an effective, independent state agency that connects research, community partnerships, policy engagement, and public dialogue in service of a more just Maine. Our research tools, including the Data Justice report and Social Drivers of Health Dashboard, help illuminate the systems that shape disparities and pathways for change. By continuing to show up for and with communities, we build relationships rooted in trust and humility, back organizations led by and serving communities of color, immigrant families, and Wabanaki people, and support work that strengthens social capital, holistic wellness, and shared celebration. We bring the insights we learn from our research and work with communities into state decision-making through our legislative testimony, collaboration with the Governor's Office, participation in statewide advisory bodies, and educational partnerships like our work with Wabanaki REACH.

Every part of this work is connected. Research clarifies the patterns; community partnerships ground us in lived experience; policy engagement opens paths for change; and narrative work builds understanding of not only what is true, but what is possible. Together, they move Maine towards systems that reflect fairness, dignity, and justice for all.

The Commission's first five years were about building a strong foundation - establishing the agency, creating baseline resources, and addressing statutory priorities. We are now in a strategic planning process to set clear goals for the next five years. Building a just Maine requires sustained commitment, honesty about our past and present, and collective imagination for what our state can become. The Permanent Commission remains dedicated to this work.

Thank you for being part of this shared effort.

With respect and gratitude,



Ariel Ricci

# Strengthening Our Foundation

In 2025, the Permanent Commission continued to strengthen our long-term stability by reviewing and improving the processes and structures that support our work. These efforts are not only operational – they are part of building a durable institution rooted in truth, accountability, and community partnership. Clear governance and strong internal systems ensure that the Commission can meet its mandate, respond to community needs with care, and sustain meaningful impact over time.

## Building a Sustainable Structure

### COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

In 2025, the Commission welcomed Commissioner Jacqueline Mugwaneza, representing an immigrant or refugee rights organization, Commissioner Dina Malual representing an organization with expertise in public benefits policy, and Commissioner Karin Leuthy, representing an economic policy or data-centered organization. We extend our sincere thanks to Commissioners who ended their service in 2025: Commissioner James Myall, who served since the Commission's inception and Commissioner Deb Ibonwa, who was first appointed in 2022.

In March, the Commission re-elected Co-Chair Maulian Bryant, and elected incoming Co-Chairs Bruce King and Amanda Comeau to serve in these roles for the next two years. Commissioner Rachel Talbot Ross stepped back as Co-Chair after six years of dedicated leadership, serving in the role since the Commission's founding in 2019. The Commission offers our heartfelt thanks for her guidance and vision during our formative years, and her deep commitment to building an institution grounded in truth, justice and community. We are grateful for the foundation she helped create and for her continued service on the Commission.

### STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The Commission completed a comprehensive review and revision of its internal governance structures. Following an assessment of governance needs, the Commission voted to rescind its previous bylaws and adopt a new set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to clarify roles, responsibilities and operating procedures. The updated SOPs provide a clearer operational framework that supports consistent, transparent, and effective Commission governance.

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

In June 2025, the Commission initiated a strategic planning process with the goal of developing a clear and accessible vision, mission, and strategic priorities that align with the Commission's statutory purpose. This framework will chart a course for the Commission's priorities and activities for the next five years, through 2030 in order to focus the Commission's efforts and impact.

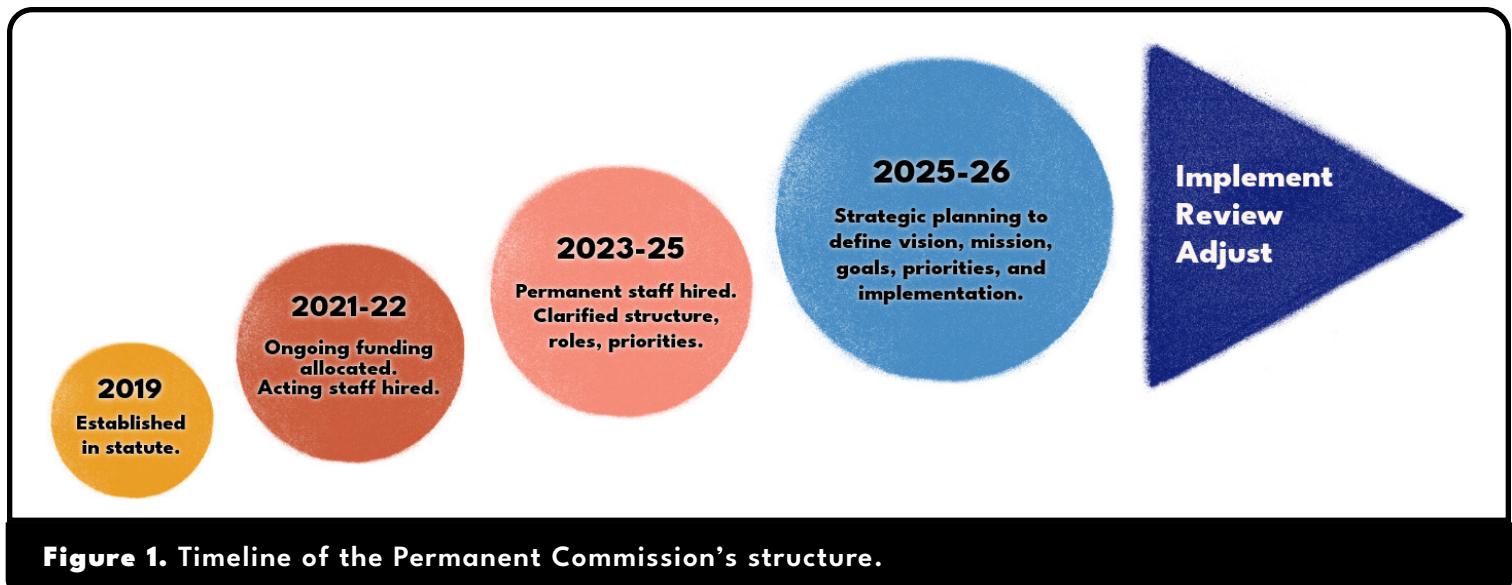
### STAFF STRUCTURE AND BUDGET

In 2025, the Permanent Commission had six state employed full-time equivalent staff, plus the support of one full-time contractor and two paid interns for two months during the summer.

The Permanent Commission's General Fund appropriation in the 2026-2027 biennial budget (PL 2025, c. 2) appears below.

| Budget*                  |           |           |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                          | 2025-26   | 2026-27   |
| <b>Positions (FTE)</b>   | 6.0       | 6.0       |
| <b>Personal Services</b> | \$818,186 | \$868,497 |
| <b>All Other</b>         | \$538,870 | \$538,870 |

\* General Fund appropriation from PL 2025, c. 2.



| Commissioner                      | Seat  | Appointing Authority           |
|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| <b>Co-Chair Maulian Bryant</b>    | <b>PENOBCOT:</b> a member of the Penobscot Nation   | <b>Penobscot Nation</b>        |
| <b>Richard Silliboy</b>           | <b>MI'KMAQ:</b> a member of the Mi'kmaq Nation  | <b>Mi'kmaq Nation</b>          |
| <b>Rev. Kenneth Lewis</b>         | <b>FAITH:</b> a member of the faith-based community   | <b>Governor</b>                |
| <b>Theo Greene</b>                | <b>LGBTQ+:</b> a member of the LGBTQ+ community   | <b>Permanent Commission</b>    |
| <b>Reginald Parson</b>            | <b>YOUTH:</b> a member representing youth   | <b>Governor</b>                |
| <b>Co-Chair Bruce King</b>        | <b>HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED POPULATION:</b> a member of a historically disadvantaged racial population  | <b>Speaker of the House</b>    |
| <b>Jason Sheldock</b>             | <b>LABOR:</b> a member of organized labor   | <b>President of the Senate</b> |
| <b>Senator Rachel Talbot Ross</b> | <b>RACIAL JUSTICE:</b> an organization which promotes civil rights and racial justice   | <b>President of the Senate</b> |
| <b>Jacqueline Mugwaneza</b>       | <b>IMMIGRANT/ REFUGEE RIGHTS:</b> an immigrant or refugee rights organization   | <b>Speaker of the House</b>    |
| <b>Co-Chair Amanda Comeau</b>     | <b>HOUSING &amp; HOMELESSNESS:</b> a housing or homelessness advocacy organization  | <b>Speaker of the House</b>    |
| <b>Sonja Thomas</b>               | <b>HIGHER EDUCATION:</b> 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 | <b>President of the Senate</b> |
| <b>Juana Rodriguez-Vazquez</b>    | <b>LATINO/ MIGRANT RIGHTS:</b> an organization representing latino and migrant communities  | <b>Permanent Commission</b>    |
| <b>Karin Leuthy</b>               | <b>ECONOMIC POLICY:</b> an economic policy or data-centered organization  | <b>President of the Senate</b> |
| <b>Dina Malual</b>                | <b>PUBLIC BENEFIT POLICY:</b> an organization with expertise in legal and policy matters related to public benefits programs assisting people with low incomes  | <b>President of the Senate</b> |
| <b>Amy Winston</b>                | <b>CDFI:</b> a representative of a community development financial institution  | <b>Speaker of the House</b>    |

| Staff                         |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Ariel Ricci</b>            | <b>Executive Director</b>              |
| <b>Leeann Sullivan</b>        | <b>Research Specialist</b>             |
| <b>Sam Zuckerman</b>          | <b>Policy Coordinator</b>              |
| <b>Morgan Pottle Urquhart</b> | <b>Communications Coordinator</b>      |
| <b>Aaron Hooks Wayman</b>     | <b>Operations Director</b>             |
| <b>Billale Fulli</b>          | <b>Community Engagement Specialist</b> |

# Understanding Systemic Barriers

The Permanent Commission approaches research through a Data Justice lens, recognizing that data is never neutral and that history and community voices are essential for understanding the inequalities we see today. Our 2025 Data Justice report establishes this framework, tracing how data has been used throughout history to shape our society and outlining the principles that guide our approach: centering consent and community power, interrogating the context behind the numbers, and understanding the systems that produce the patterns we observe.

With this lens, we use publicly available data to track inequality over time and across Maine's social landscape. We bring critical frameworks and historical analysis into understanding what drives inequality in and across our communities; and we document stories for the future – stories of injustice but also stories of resilience, innovation, and connection that sustain our communities and our dynamic cultures. Together, this work helps us move beyond describing problems to asking why they exist, how they came to be, and what needs to change so every community in Maine can thrive.

## Tools for Asking Better Questions

### DATA JUSTICE REPORT

Data is a powerful tool for making invisible patterns visible – if it is collected and used with care. We know that for data to improve outcomes in practice, that data needs to be used – used for good, and only for good. That is why we published our Data Justice report in April 2025, exploring the role that data has played in shaping our world through history and the opportunities and limitations of using data to achieve fair outcomes. The report includes examples of how data reflects human choices about what is counted, and whose experiences matter, and how it can be used to harm. It also offers a framework that describes how the Permanent Commission approaches research and data broadly, centering community history, consent, and power at every stage of the process.

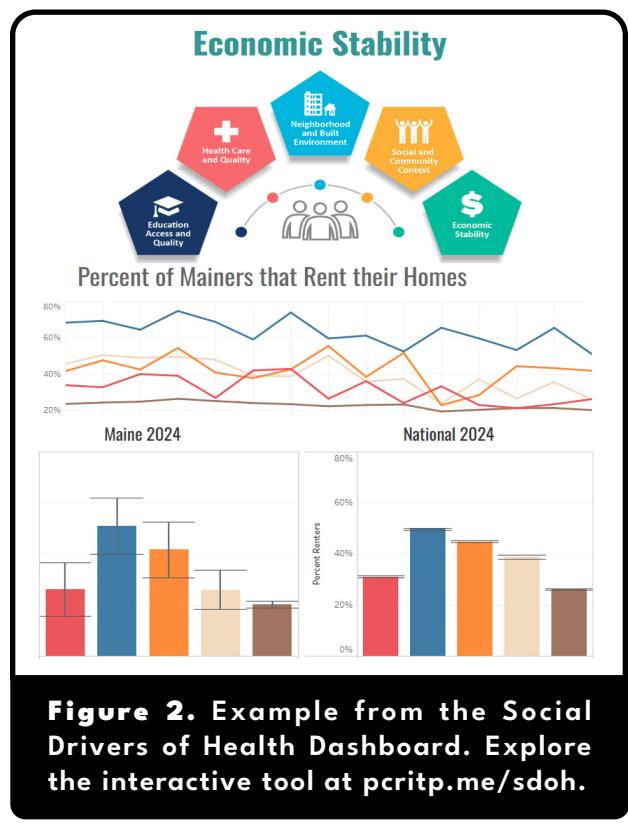
While we know that quantitative data can't explain why inequalities exist, it can provide a crucial starting point for asking better questions about our world. Guided by the Data Justice framework, the Permanent Commission develops tools that help Mainers understand the systems, structures, and conditions that shape our communities.

### SOCIAL DRIVERS OF HEALTH DASHBOARD

In August 2025, the Permanent Commission launched the interactive Social Drivers of Health Dashboard as a resource for community members, policymakers, and state agencies to compare indicators across communities and over time. Social drivers of health reflect a broad range of systemic factors that influence our wellbeing, from economic stability and healthcare access to education, the built environment, and the strength of our social ties.

By highlighting these systemic drivers of wellbeing, the dashboard brings context to understanding what produces health disparities in Maine, including how Maine compares to national trends. It encourages policymakers and researchers to ask questions that shift attention away from a narrow focus on personal responsibility for health outcomes toward the policies, history, and conditions that shape how we move through our day-to-day lives.

At a time when some federal agencies are limiting access to data that tracks these conditions, tools like this dashboard play an increasingly important role in ensuring that communities, policymakers, and researchers can still understand the systemic factors shaping health in Maine.

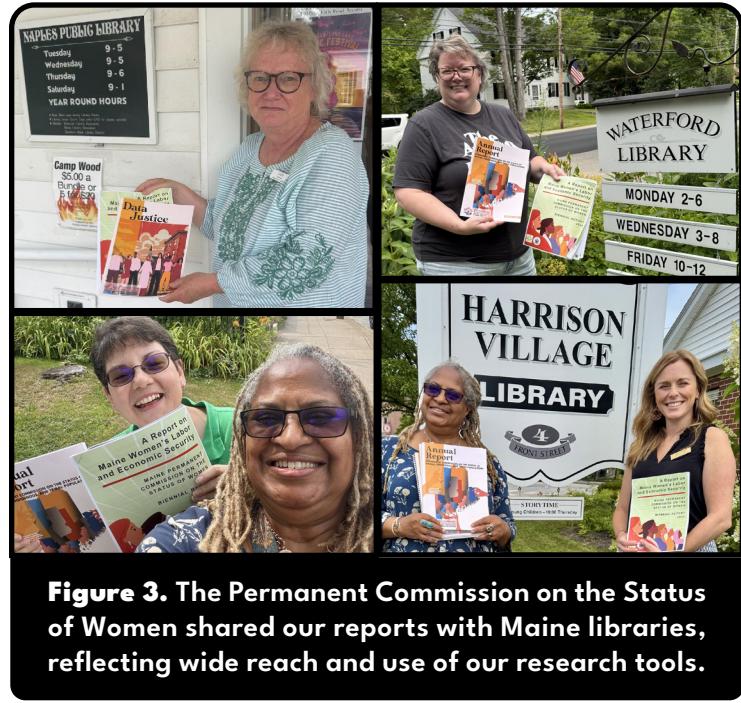


## STATE OF RACIAL DISPARITIES REPORT

Building on our 2024 State of Racial Disparities report, the Permanent Commission is preparing to release its first biennial update in the fall of 2026. This updated report will include refreshed data, expanded indicators, and new areas of inquiry shaped by our Data Justice framework and our ongoing community engagement efforts.

Like the dashboard, the State of Racial Disparities report is designed to make patterns of injustice visible, and to make that information accessible to the public. These are tools to help communities, advocates, and policymakers better understand where disparities persist, what systems are producing them, and where targeted action could make the greatest difference.

Together, the dashboard and the State of Racial Disparities report form a foundation for asking questions that matter: not just what the numbers show, but why those patterns exist and what it will take to build the just, healthy future every Mainer deserves.



**Figure 3.** The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women shared our reports with Maine libraries, reflecting wide reach and use of our research tools.

## Putting Research Tools to Work

### EXAMINING HARM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Our Data Justice lens shapes not only the tools we build, but also how we investigate the systems that affect people's lives.

In February 2025, the Permanent Commission published *Restorative Justice: An Examination*, a report commissioned by the Legislature under PL2021, CH 101. The report assessed the current landscape of restorative justice programs in Maine and the potential, challenges, and readiness for expanding these programs in the future.

Our findings were clear: Maine's criminal legal system is not adequately serving victims, nor is it preventing harm.

These challenges are echoed across the United States, where criminal legal systems regularly fall short of creating accountability or supporting healing. What we see in Maine is part of a national pattern, one that reveals the limits of punitive approaches and the urgent need for community-centered approaches.

While restorative justice is not a catch-all solution, research suggests that the benefits of restorative justice can ripple out in multiple directions, including to those who are harmed through improved healing, to those who cause harm and their communities through reduced crime and other downstream impacts, and to the state through reduced spending.

Through the report, the Permanent Commission highlighted the need for the state to support programs that build strong and healthy communities; committed to supporting the creation of forums to build momentum across the restorative justice community; and uplifted policy solutions that focus on youth and adult diversion prior to incarceration. Taken together, this work helps us see how our current systems respond to harm and how community-centered approaches can point toward better outcomes for everyone.

### UNDERSTANDING HOW THE PAST SHAPES THE PRESENT

Many of the disparities we see around us today are rooted in ideas, decisions, and policies of the past. As we have compiled resources and data to understand and track these disparities, we are often left asking why the patterns persist, even as laws, language, and institutions change over time..

To provide that missing context, the Permanent Commission launched the first of a series we are calling *A Brief History Of...*, where we take a specific topic and dig into its historical context. This year, we looked at voting rights, exploring how the ongoing fight to secure, expand, and protect those rights has taken shape across time and space.

By grounding today's disparities in their historical context, this series helps illuminate how systemic injustice is reproduced, how communities have resisted it, and how past harms continue to shape present realities.

### LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES AND REFRAMING HOUSING NARRATIVES

While all of this work has been moving forward, the Permanent Commission is also advancing a multi-method, community-engaged research initiative designed to understand how the stories we believe about housing shape the policy solutions we consider possible.

Through survey research, community storytelling events, and policy analysis, we aim to open new lines of inquiry and action that get to the root of Maine's housing challenges, especially for communities of color who face compounding barriers to accessing safe, sustainable, and affordable places to call home.

By grounding this work in lived experience, we aim to challenge dominant narratives about scarcity, worthiness, and responsibility, and ask different questions about housing that could lead to more just and effective policy solutions.

# Building Trust and Connections

The Permanent Commission's community engagement work is grounded in a deep commitment to the people and communities we serve. We recognize an essential truth: building trust requires an acknowledgment of harm. Many of the communities we partner with – particularly Black, immigrant, and Wabanaki communities, and other communities of color – have experienced generations of harm from government institutions. This history shapes how our presence as a government entity is felt. Choosing a different path means committing to long-term relationships rather than short-term transactions. It requires us to follow the lead of those closest to the challenges and closest to the solutions, and to reduce the barriers that keep communities from being heard or supported.

Across Maine, community-led organizations are already creating pathways toward a healthy and thriving future. Through continued outreach and engagement, we are listening and following their lead. Together, we are working for a more connected, fair, and thriving future for all Mainers – one rooted in trust, community wisdom, and collective care.

## Supporting Community Solutions

### SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Social capital – the network of relationships, trust, and mutual support that connect us with one another – is not only essential to community life, it is a core driver of health. Research shows that when people have strong networks of connection, they experience lower stress, better mental and physical health, greater stability, and better access to information and resources to support their wellbeing. Through the Social Capital Development Grant, using one-time Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan (MJRP) federal funding, we invested in community-led organizations to design projects centering cultural knowledge, lived experience, and local leadership. Over the past year and a half, nine organizations have developed and implemented programs that cultivate community connections and address the social drivers of health that shape daily life across Maine.

Across all projects, several shared themes became clear. Grantees deepened access to culturally grounded practices, strengthened

**“We are grateful to be in partnership with you in this work. Your approach to being in relationship is deeply appreciated.”\***

community connections, expanded opportunities for learning and leadership, and created spaces where people could gather, support one another, and build the foundations of long-term wellbeing. These efforts highlight how social capital functions as essential social infrastructure, creating the conditions for healthier and more connected communities across Maine.

### SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Maine Council on Aging - Khmer Maine - Healthy Acadia - Quality Housing Coalition - YMCA of Southern Maine - Maine Inside Out - Mano en Mano - Cultivating Community - Pihcintu

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS GRANTS

The Permanent Commission funded nine organizations to develop programs that support creative approaches to improving overall health and wellness in Maine for under-resourced communities. These initiatives reflected the many ways communities define and support health. Many organizations created spaces where youth, older adults, and immigrant and refugee communities could gather, move, create, and care for one another. Others deepened access to culturally relevant food and wellness practices, or offered opportunities for storytelling, artmaking, and connection after periods of isolation or transition. These programs show how

community-led approaches to health create environments where people feel seen, supported, and connected.

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS PARTNERS

La Finca - United Youth Empowerment Services - Maine Association of New Americans - Fitness Bridge - Boys and Girls Club of Maliseet - Seeing for Ourselves and Generational Noor - Gateway Community Services Maine - YWCA of Central Maine - Tree Street Youth



**Figure 4. Photo highlights of community-led initiatives supported in 2025.**

## RETHINKING FOOD, COMMUNITY, AND CARE: NARRATIVE CHANGE FOR FOOD SECURITY GRANT

In early 2025, the Permanent Commission worked with the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) to support community-led projects aimed at shifting how Mainers understand food insecurity and the systems that shape it. These awards supported organizations to uplift community stories, share local knowledge, and challenge narratives that place responsibility for hunger on individuals rather than policy choices and structural conditions. Awardees participated in peer learning sessions to exchange ideas and strengthen relationships with one another.

Across all projects, grantees emphasized that ending hunger is about more than access to food, it is about dignity, community, connection, and the right to meet our needs without shame or stigma. Some organizations mapped resources that make it easier for families to understand resources in their communities. Others expanded access to culturally relevant foods, highlighted community-led solutions, or celebrated the leadership of Black farmers in Maine. These projects reframed hunger as a shared challenge shaped by policy decisions, while lifting up the work of community leaders.

### FOOD SECURITY NARRATIVE CHANGE PARTNERS

**Cumberland County Public Health Department - Healthy Acadia - Maine Food Convergence Project - Ifka Community Services - Northeast Federation of Cooperatives**

## HONORING HISTORY, COMMUNITY, AND BLACK JOY: JUNETEENTH EVENTS

The Permanent Commission funded organizations to host Juneteenth celebrations, educational events, and community gatherings across Maine. These awards supported projects that honored Black history, created space for connection and reflection, and uplifted Black leadership and creativity across the state.

Across the events, several themes emerged. Many organizers centered joy, cultural expression, and community gathering, bringing people together through food, art, performance, and shared learning. Others highlighted local Black history, created opportunities for remembrance, or held ceremonies and performances rooted in community storytelling. These celebrations demonstrated the importance of creating public spaces where Black history, culture, and community care are visible, honored, and celebrated.

### JUNETEENTH PARTNERS

**Maine Inside Out - Juneteenth Downeast - Intercultural Community Center - The Third Place - NAACP of Greater Bangor - Portland Public Library**

**“We appreciate the trust placed in us in carrying out the project in a culturally appropriate way.”\***

### SHOWING UP WHEN COMMUNITIES LEAD

In addition to our grant programs, the Permanent Commission supported several community-led initiatives throughout 2025. One truth remains constant: communities know what they need, and they have been building solutions long before state systems recognized or supported them. By showing up with care and consistency, we can help ensure that community wisdom and leadership inform the policy choices that shape people's lives. These partnerships remind us of both the strength of community solutions and the responsibility of government to listen, learn, and make different choices that can lead toward a future where every community has what it needs to thrive.

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

**Wabanaki Public Health and Wellness brought culturally grounded ceremonies to several Maine detention facilities, supporting community healing for people preparing to return to their communities.**

**Place Matters** hosted the dee Clarke Justice Fellowship Program to support emerging community leaders in developing skills, mentorship networks, and self-directed projects.

**Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition** strengthened connections with coalition members, identified strengths and needs across partner organizations, and explored opportunities for deeper collaboration among state and community partners.

\*Quotes from 2025 grants and mini award community partners.

# Illuminating Paths Toward Justice

The Permanent Commission's policy and communications work are grounded in what we learn through research and community engagement. Our statute charges us with examining the disparities that communities face and improving the outcomes that shape people's lives. To do that effectively, we take the truths we uncover – the patterns in the data, the history that explains them, and the lived experiences communities share – and put them to work in the places where decisions are made and public understanding is shaped.

The policies and systems that shape our daily lives rest on the foundation of the stories we believe about responsibility, belonging, worthiness, and power. When those stories are incomplete or distorted, they narrow our imagination and limit the solutions we believe are possible. Truly understanding the stories of our past and present is an essential step in writing a better future.

Through policy engagement, we bring community wisdom, historical context, and research directly to policymakers and government officials, helping illuminate where our systems fall short and how they could function differently. Through communications and public awareness, we work with communities across Maine to expand a shared understanding of race, history, and justice, ensuring that these truths are accessible to everyone, not only those in positions of power.

## Putting Narratives to Work Where Decisions Are Made

Fair outcomes require a clear understanding of how history, policy, and lived experience shape our present. As an independent, nonpartisan commission, we advise all three branches of Maine government, providing evidence-based guidance grounded in research, history, and community experience into legislative hearings, executive engagement, and statewide advisory councils. This part of our work focuses on the places where state decisions are written, debated, and implemented – where stories become policy.

### LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Our legislative work is rooted in the understanding that policy decisions shape the conditions in which disparities persist. When we speak on legislation, we do so from what we learn through research and community engagement, asking not only how a bill addresses immediate needs but how it fits into the larger story of who is supported, protected, or excluded by state systems. Guided by our capacity, our mandate, and the realities communities experience, we testified in 2025 on bills affecting racial, Indigenous, and tribal justice, public safety, education, economic stability, housing, food access, data protection, and immigration enforcement. In each case, we brought forward historical context and insights from our work to surface the consequences of policy choices and the paths toward a more just future.\*

### WABANAKI REACH

In 2025, the Permanent Commission continued its partnership with Wabanaki REACH to support education grounded in Wabanaki leadership, truth-telling, and healing. This collaboration directly advances Recommendation 11 of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which calls on state leaders to “Support the work of Maine-Wabanaki REACH in both Wabanaki and non-Native communities to foster truth, healing and change.”

Over the past year, Wabanaki REACH led a series of trainings for state employees, policymakers, and community members that examined more than 400 years of colonization and its ongoing impacts on Wabanaki people. Through this partnership, Wabanaki REACH delivered fifteen events, including Interacting with Wabanaki-Maine History, Decolonizing Non-Native Communities, and two free public screenings of *Downland*, reaching more than 500 people across state agencies, the Legislature, and Maine communities.

“Since the trainings, I think differently about the world. I can’t not see places and spaces where Wabanaki people should be. I also wonder how laws and initiatives might affect them and if they had a place at the table for helping to shape policy in Maine.”\*

These sessions invited participants to confront Maine's true history: the dispossession of Wabanaki homelands, assimilation policies, the systematic removal of Wabanaki children, and the ongoing trauma created by state and federal systems. Participants overwhelmingly reported gaining new information, making connections they had not understood before, and re-examining how their roles in state government intersect with Wabanaki sovereignty, safety, and wellbeing. Many brought what they learned back to their agencies, teams, and communities.

## ADVISING THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE

In 2025, the Permanent Commission advised the Governor's Office on LD 1971, An Act to Protect Workers in This State by Clarifying the Relationship of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies with Federal Immigration Authorities. This legislation has significant implications for public safety and community trust, particularly for immigrant, refugee, and mixed-status families across Maine.

Public safety depends on trust, and trust is undermined when people fear that interactions with state or local governments may expose them or their families to federal civil immigration enforcement. When people feel unsafe calling for help, driving to work, bringing their children to school, visiting the doctor's office, or accessing public services, every Mainers is less safe. Throughout 2025, community organizations shared growing concerns about increased ICE activity in Maine, including detentions that separated families and sent people out of state, limiting their ability to access legal support.

In response, the Permanent Commission prepared an advisory briefing for the Governor's Office that brought forward the historical, legal, and community safety considerations at the heart of LD 1971. Commission representatives met with senior staff to share this context alongside insights from community partners, researchers, and legal experts, offering analysis to support informed executive decision-making rooted in safety, trust, and community wellbeing.

## BRINGING A RACIAL JUSTICE LENS TO STATE ADVISORY BODIES

In 2025, the Permanent Commission participated in state advisory groups. Our role in each is to bring a racial justice lens, historical context, and community-rooted insight to state systems whose decisions have deep impacts on people's lives.

### Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

The CSEC Working Group released a comprehensive report in 2025, highlighting how commercial sexual exploitation in Maine is shaped by racial exclusion, systemic injustice, and long-standing gaps in institutional responses. The report makes clear that young people who have been pushed to the margins of their communities through racial exclusion face heightened risk of exploitation, deeper entanglement with state systems, and fewer pathways to safety and support. For Wabanaki youth, the lack of reliable data, including federal failures to track missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, further obscures the full scope of harm.

The report underscores that exploitation is not an individual failure, but a product of systemic conditions such as poverty, criminalization, gender-based violence, racism, and the lack of culturally grounded support. The Permanent Commission contributed analysis on racial exclusion, data gaps, and the need for community-led strategies that center healing, safety, and autonomy for young people.

### Primary Care Advisory Council

The Permanent Commission holds a seat on the newly created Primary Care Advisory Council, created to strengthen Maine's primary care system. The Council is charged with improving access to care, strengthening the workforce, and ensuring that preventive and screening services reach people across the state, including rural communities. Our role is to ensure that discussions reflect the realities facing communities who have historically been overlooked or underserved by the health system — including immigrants, communities of color, and rural Mainers.

Our presence in these advisory bodies ensures that policy recommendations are informed by historical truth, lived experience, and the community-rooted insights that are too often absent from state decision-making.

## Sharing Stories that Reshape What We Believe is Possible

Stories about who belongs, who is worthy, and how we got here define the limits of our imagination for the future. Through public events, community partnerships, and shared learning spaces, we are sharing stories that expand our limits and create space for building a brighter future for all Maine people.

### ANNUAL MEETING

The 2025 Annual Meeting brought people together around a shared value: that everyone in Maine deserves the chance to live a full, healthy life. Commissioners and staff shared what we've learned through our research, our community partnerships, and our Data Justice work — and we invited participants to help shape where we go next.

**“We are slowly creating more accessible and equitable housing but local barriers and funding remain challenges.”\***

**“This will be foundational in our training for civic education. It’s so timely.”\***

\*Quotes from November 20, 2025 Annual Meeting attendees.

Annual meeting attendees named the strengths and successes growing in their communities:

- Community leaders working to expand access to housing.
- Programs delivering food to families in motels, creating garden-based learning, and providing transportation.
- Community-based organizations building relationships between adults and young people in immigrant communities.
- Peer support networks helping people navigate systems and get the resources they need.

Participants also told us how they plan to use our Data Justice report, weaving it into evaluation processes, civic education, and organizational training; and where they want to see stronger support in the year ahead: non-medical transportation, food access, LGBTQ+ and immigrant intersectionality, and deeper public understanding of the lived experiences behind the data.

## **PUBLIC NARRATIVE CHANGE EVENTS**

Narrative change has long been part of the Permanent Commission's work, supporting community-led events that tell honest stories about Maine and the people who call it home. These efforts show how powerful narrative change can be when it grows from community leadership and lived experience.

In 2025, we expanded this work by launching the Narrative Change Event Grant program, creating a more intentional and accessible pathway for communities to lead public events that deepen understanding of Maine's history, culture, and shared future. Grantees will host events in 2026 offering opportunities for Mainers to examine honest history, share community stories, and open space for public conversation.

What unites all of this work is a shared truth: changing the way we understand our past and present is essential to shaping a more just future. By supporting communities to reshape our understanding, we ensure that the stories guiding Maine's future come from the people who have lived that history, and who are leading the work to imagine something better. 

## **NARRATIVE CHANGE PARTNERS**

**Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition - Wabanaki**  
**Public Health and Wellness - New England Arab**  
**American Organization - Black Travel Maine -**  
**Atlantic Black Box - The Third Place - Community**  
**Change, Inc. - Community Organizing Alliance**