

**Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross**  
Co-Chair

**Amb. Maulian Dana,**  
**Penobscot Nation**  
Co-Chair



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

December 1, 2022

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

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To Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and the Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

We are writing to provide you with an update on progress related to LD 1934, "Resolve, Changing the Identifying and Reporting Responsibilities and Extending the Reporting Deadline for the Identification of Places in the State with Offensive Names."

This legislation entrusted the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations with reviewing state law regarding offensive place names. To this end, the Permanent Commission was tasked with creating and operationalizing an advisory committee that would aid in identifying additional offensive words, recommending changes to existing statute, establishing a uniform renaming process, and creating a means of identifying individuals and entities having benefited from the global economy of enslavement in view of locating places named in their honor. The Permanent Commission was also directed to submit a report detailing the status of work on offensive place names and including any suggested legislation by December 1, 2022.

Since LD 1934 was signed into law last April, the Permanent Commission has conducted extensive research into the origins and nature of the State's toponymy, devoting particular

attention to the history behind placenames bearing the word “Negro,” of which there remain 11 today. It has additionally compiled datasets on Maine enslavers, slave traders, and individuals having committed atrocities against the Indigenous people of this land in view of locating places named in their honor.

The Permanent Commission has convened an extraordinary group of individuals to serve on its Advisory Council, which features representation from all four tribes; from multigenerational Maine African American community leaders; from the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; from multiple public humanities organizations; as well as academics, educators, and members of impacted communities. While the Advisory Council has made important progress toward the execution of tasks enumerated in LD 1934, its work on this bill is far from complete.

As the Council began its deliberations, it soon became clear that the process of determining what words are “offensive” is deeply nuanced. This complexity is not a barrier, but rather a rich opportunity for public engagement around the many ways in which racialized and Indigenous populations are represented in or absent from the narrative inscribed on the natural and built environment in the land now known as Maine. While Advisory Council members consider that identifying additional offensive words to embed in statute is a premature activity at this stage, they may well wish to recommend amendments as new research findings emerge and as their deliberations evolve.

Given the enormity of the project and because it must be completed within the Permanent Commission’s existing resources, capacity limitations did not allow for the full realization of all the duties outlined in the bill. We propose to carry out work in fulfillment of this resolve over the next two years.

As such, The Permanent Commission will deliver another interim report to this committee on June 24, 2023. This will allow the Advisory Council to move farther along in its work to foster research, education, and healing around the nuanced language of this place, and to keep you updated on this work.

Thank you for your consideration of this report. The Permanent Commission welcomes the opportunity to update the Committee at the date and in the manner of its choosing. Please contact Morgan Pottle Urquhart, Director of Policy and Communications at [morgan.e.urquhart@maine.gov](mailto:morgan.e.urquhart@maine.gov) with any questions.

Sincerely,



Representative Rachel Talbot Ross,  
Co-Chair



Ambassador Maulian Dana,  
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