

# Maine Social Equity Program (SEP) Advisory Committee

## Inaugural Meeting Minutes

**Date:** September 16, 2025

**Time:** 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM (via Zoom)

**Facilitator:** Dr. Brien C. Walton, Consultant, Acadia Capital Management

**Chair:** Angela Okafor

**Recording:** Zoom transcript on file

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## 1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM by **Dr. Brien Walton**, with introductory remarks by **Commissioner Mike Duguay** and **Director Charlotte Mace** of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD).

### Attendees

- **Sen. Rachel Talbot Ross**, Maine State Legislature (Bill Sponsor)
- **Commissioner Mike Duguay**, DECD
- **Director Charlotte Mace**, Office of Business Development, DECD
- **Dr. Brien C. Walton**, DECD Consultant / Facilitator
- **Angela Okafor, Esq.**, Committee Chair
- **Dr. Darmita G. Wilson**, Member
- **Calvin Akers**, Member
- **Susan Omega**, Member
- **Eric Weidman**, DECD Staff Liaison

### Absent

- Representatives from the Departments of Labor (DOL) and Administrative & Financial Services (DAFS) (to be invited for future sessions).
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## 2. Opening Remarks

**Commissioner Duguay** commended the creation of the Advisory Committee, noting the urgency of developing equitable access to economic opportunities for historically impacted

communities. He emphasized collaboration, cross-agency involvement, and community reintegration through workforce and business development.

**Director Mace** reaffirmed DECD’s statutory responsibility to oversee the program in alignment with legislative intent and procurement compliance, confirming that Dr. Walton was competitively selected to administer the SEP contract.

**Senator Talbot Ross** provided the legislative and moral foundation of the SEP:

- The **Social Equity Program** is an act of **reparative justice**, not traditional DEI.
  - The law’s reference to **1971** marks the onset of systemic harm caused by the **War on Drugs**, disproportionately impacting **African American and Indigenous** populations.
  - The SEP is funded by **cannabis tax revenues** as a form of reparations.
  - The program’s purpose is to repair sustained structural and economic inequities, particularly for U.S. citizens from historically disenfranchised racial, ethnic, or tribal communities.
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### 3. Program Overview

**Dr. Walton** outlined the statutory charge of the Advisory Committee under **Title 5, Chapter 395**:

- Advise DECD on program development and implementation.
- Shape the **Seed Grant Program** and recommend **technical assistance** models.
- Guide outreach strategies and review outcomes for the **2026 Legislative Report**.

#### Program deliverables for Year One

1. Establish a functioning advisory process.
  2. Create a comprehensive outreach plan.
  3. Design and launch the **SEP Seed Grant Program**.
  4. Deliver technical assistance to grantees.
  5. Submit the **Legislative Report** by December 2026.
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### 4. Discussion Summary

#### 4.1 Barriers Facing Impacted Entrepreneurs

**Key barriers identified:**

- **Access to capital** – historic discrimination by banks and funding institutions.

- **Operational knowledge** – lack of training in business management, accounting, and compliance.
- **Technical mentorship** – insufficient post-funding support to ensure sustainability.
- **Workforce isolation** – cultural and geographic barriers to participation in existing development programs.
- **Interagency gaps** – limited engagement from DOL and DAFS despite legislative directives.

#### Action Items:

- DECD to coordinate with **DOL** and **DAFS** to check on the status of workforce integration.
  - DECD to seek clarification of the commitments from both agencies.
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## 4.2 Funding Allocation

**Current Appropriation:** \$300,000 total (\$150,000 for administration of the SEP; \$150,000 for seed grants).

#### Concerns Raised:

- Sen. Talbot Ross clarified that the legislative intent was **\$300,000 for the fund itself**, not divided for administration.
- Discussion on the potential to pursue a **funding increase** in future legislative sessions.

#### Preliminary Consensus:

- Provide **10 awards at \$15,000 each** to balance reach and impact.
  - Allow flexibility for use of funds (feasibility studies, business plans, startup capital, operational support).
  - Establish clear **eligibility and reporting criteria** to comply with statutory “seed funding” language.
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## 4.3 Guiding Principles for Allocation

Members proposed incorporating the following **guiding criteria**:

1. Regional and industry diversity.
2. Gender and demographic balance.
3. Inclusion of businesses at various stages (idea, startup, existing).
4. Feasibility and sustainability potential.
5. Emphasis on education and technical mentorship.

6. Data-informed allocation decisions.
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#### 4.4 Application Criteria Discussion

##### Suggestions:

- Require a **brief personal narrative** describing how the applicant’s experience reflects the “impacted community” definition (without requiring excessive disclosure).
- Use storytelling to document generational harm and resilience.
- Ensure clarity to distinguish between **historically impacted U.S. citizens** and other populations already served by programs such as the **Office of New Americans**.

##### Next Steps:

- Dr. Walton to draft and circulate **sample application formats** for committee feedback.
  - Include short narrative prompts and optional demographic verification questions.
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#### 4.5 Data and Evaluation Needs

Sen. Talbot Ross emphasized gathering **historical and generational data** on:

- Racially impacted business ownership since 1971.
- Comparative funding access and closure rates.
- Overlap with existing state programs (DOL, CEI, New Ventures Maine, SBDC, etc.).

##### Agreed Data Sources:

- **State Economist Amanda Rector** (for economic/demographic datasets).
- **Maine Development Foundation** (for business ecosystem data).
- **CEI, DECD, and DOL** (for existing outreach and training data).

##### Action Items:

- DECD to introduce Dr. Walton to Amanda Rector data inquiry.
  - Dr. Walton to prepare a **briefing document modeled after the Massachusetts SEP** outlining comparative structures and data references.
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#### 4.6 Community Engagement and Inclusion

- Members agreed to ensure representation from **Indigenous (Wabanaki)** communities before the next meeting.
- Outreach will be guided by equitable access rather than regional quotas.
- Dr. Walton to integrate engagement plans from **DECD, DOL, and DAFS** once interagency participation is secured.

## 5. Summary of Next Steps

Task	Responsible Party	Due Date / Status
Begin business/economic data collection from DOL, DECD, and the State Economist	Dr. Walton	December 2025
Prepare Massachusetts SEP comparative briefing document	Dr. Walton	November 2025
Draft SEP application framework & guiding principles document	Dr. Walton	November 2025
Confirm status of DOL & DAFS participation in future meetings	DECD	December 2025
Explore inclusion of Wabanaki representative	Chair Okafor & Sen. Talbot Ross	Before December meeting
Draft agenda for next meeting (Engagement Plan focus)	Dr. Walton	November 2025

## 6. Public Comment

None (no members of the public attended).

## 7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at **12:02 PM** by **Chair Angela Okafor**.  
Next meeting scheduled for **December 2025** (date TBD).

### Prepared by:

Dr. Brien C. Walton  
Consultant, Acadia Capital Management  
**Date Prepared:** October 17, 2025