

Support the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda

Changing the MA Flag and Seal: (S.1877/H.2776) A Resolve to establish a special commission for the purpose of investigating the seal and motto of the Commonwealth to determine that they faithfully reflect and embody the historic and contemporary commitments of the Commonwealth to peace, justice, liberty and equality, and to spreading the opportunities and advantages of education. This Commission will be chaired by the Executive Director of the Commission on Indian Affairs, and will include at least five Native American members appointed by the Chair. It is expected that this Commission would consider, as cosponsor Senator Jason Lewis wrote, that “Our collective symbols of identity matter, and if they marginalize some of our fellow residents and perpetuate harmful stereotypes, they should be replaced.” (Boston Globe, 9/8/19)

Prohibiting Native Mascots in MA: (S.247 / H.443) An Act prohibiting the use of Native American mascots by public schools in the Commonwealth. Currently about 38 public high schools in the state use Native American mascots. This bill would task the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education with establishing regulations to prohibit Native American mascots in MA public schools. Decades of social science research shows that Native American mascots are harmful to both Native American and non-Native youth, and perpetuate stereotypes. The National Congress of American Indians and over 115 tribal, government, education, professional, civil rights, and religious organizations in the United States have recognized the negative health impacts of Native American mascots and called for their elimination.

Establishing a Statewide Indigenous People’s Day: (H.3665) An Act establishing an Indigenous Peoples Day. This bill replaces Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in the Massachusetts General Laws. Changing the 2nd Monday in October to Indigenous People’s Day acknowledges the harmful impact of celebrating Columbus as a hero. Historical accounts prove that wherever they went, Columbus and his men murdered and enslaved Indigenous People. The repercussions continue to be keenly felt even now. Indigenous Peoples Day replaces something negative with something positive - an increased awareness of Indigenous Peoples and a celebration of Indigenous resilience and survival, in MA as well as throughout the Americas.

Improving Indigenous Educational Outcomes: (H.444) An Act providing for the creation of a permanent commission relative to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native residents of the Commonwealth. As a State Education Agency, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must engage in timely and meaningful consultation with stakeholders. Representatives of Indian tribes located in the state are explicitly identified as stakeholders. Research indicates the importance of a sustained focus on improving opportunities and outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native students, who have: 61.9% proficiency in English Language Arts; 52.6% proficiency in Math; and 42.4% proficiency in Science.

Protecting Native American Heritage: (S.1811/H.2948) An Act to protect Native American Heritage. This would ensure that Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (those of cultural, traditional or historical importance to their heritage) held in governmental, municipal or non-profit collections are not sold for profit. Law enforcement efforts to preserve heritage and to deter trafficking of these objects currently rely on Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). NAGPRA currently only applies to publicly funded entities that receive federal funding. “Tribal cultural heritage belongs to the tribal community of its origin as a whole. And by tribal custom, cannot be alienated from that community by any individual or group without the expressed free, prior, and informed consent of that tribe.” Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais, Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), testifying before the US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in 2016.

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