

Testimony of Pax Christi Maine
In Support of LD 1970 An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act

Submitted for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary, May 31, 2023

Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,
my name is Mary Beth DiMarco, a resident of Houlton, here representing Pax Christi Maine.
Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 1970 An Act to Enact the
Maine Indian Child Welfare Act.

Pax Christi Maine is part of a national and international movement working for peace, justice & environmental sustainability. Pax Christi, meaning "Peace of Christ", is rooted in Gospel nonviolence and Catholic Social Teaching, which includes principles of human dignity, care for God's creation, and solidarity. Support of right relationship with our Wabanaki neighbors exemplifies these principles.

The United States and Maine have a history of removing a disproportionately high number native children from not only their homes, but from their extended families and subsequently from their cultures. Since 1978, the federal Indian Child Welfare Act has protected native children and their families from unnecessary separation. The act has, for the most part, met its goals and, in fact, is considered the "gold standard" in child welfare policy and practice by 18 national child advocacy organizations. Keeping children connected with their families and their culture has been proven to be a vital protective factor.

This well-proven policy is in danger of being overturned by the Supreme Court this summer. We implore you to take action to prevent this. The State of Maine must protect Wabanaki children, families, their culture, and sovereignty. During Maine's Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in 2015, we heard the moving testimony of tribal citizens who as children were placed with non-indigenous families. All suffered enormously due to separation from their culture and their identity and a great many suffered abuse. Since then, the state has worked hard to come into compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act. Sen. King, Sen. Collins and Rep Chellie Pingree were among 87 members of Congress who showed support for ICWA. Maine child welfare workers also support implementation of the law.

Pax Christi Maine fully supports LD 1970 which would codify ICWA into Maine law so that this important work can continue. The shameful history of Christian churches' participation in the removal of native children from their families and into boarding schools, foster care and adoption makes it imperative that Pax Christi Maine speaks out for substantive change in policy!

Please vote LD 1970, An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act ought to pass.