

Esther Anne
Indian Island
LD 1970

LD 1970, An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

May 31, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Esther Anne, a resident of Indian Island and a member of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik.

Please support LD 1970, “An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act.”

To do so is to continue the proud tradition of working together to understand and honor the letter and spirit of the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act or ICWA. The saying as Maine goes so goes the Nation rings true when it comes to tribal-state relations around child welfare.

It is my honor to be part of the original group of tribal and state child welfare workers who came together at the request of OCFS to develop a training for caseworkers to help them comply with ICWA. The Tribal State ICWA Workgroup gathered for the first time in November 1999 at the Bangor Public Library and in May of 2000 delivered the mandated training to over 500 caseworkers in 5 areas across the state.

The group has stayed together and continues to meet regularly to develop relationships, create better policy, improve caseworker training and engage with each other as equals. In Maine, in an ICWA case, Wabanaki tribal child welfare workers are considered and treated by state caseworkers as co-case managers, resulting in the better outcomes for children and families.

In 2012, the Governor and five Wabanaki Chiefs signed the mandate for the historic Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated the ICWA, listening to and documenting Wabanaki and Mainers experiences through a process of truth, healing and change. The Commission’s report was released in 2015 and included recommendations for the ICWA Workgroup and beyond.

The Tribal State ICWA Workgroup has long wished for a piece of legislation such as LD 1970. The timing of which could not be more critical as Federal ICWA is once again being threatened.

To support LD 1970 is to acknowledge the decades of hard work of the people from OCFS and the Tribes who come together for the children; it would validate their expertise and ensure that they can continue implementing best child welfare practices with Tribal Nations.

Please support LD 1970, “An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act.”

Sincerely
Esther Anne