

My name is Beth Clifford, and I live in Perry. I'm writing this testimony in support of LD 1970.

In 1978, the U.S. Congress worked closely with American Indian and Alaska Native elected officials, child welfare experts and families whose children had been unnecessarily removed from their homes to pass the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978. ICWA was designed to protect Indigenous children and families from biased child welfare practices and well-documented disregard for their families and cultures.

According to the National Indian Child Welfare Association, nationwide 25% to 35% of all Indigenous children were removed from their homes by state child welfare and private adoption agencies in 1978. As many as 85% of those children were placed outside of their families and communities, even when fit and willing relatives were available.

In Maine, according to a 2015 report of the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission, Wabanaki children were placed in foster care in similarly higher rates than non-Native children prior to ICWA's enactment in 1978. In 1972, the rate of removal for Wabanaki children in Aroostook County was 62.4 times higher than the statewide rate for non-Native children. The rates for Maine were the second highest in the nation at that time. (Source: Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission report, page 21)

ICWA ensures that Wabanaki children will remain connected to their culture, extended family and their community. These practices are critical to supporting Wabanaki children's wellbeing. By enacting LD 1970, Maine would join 12 other states that have acted to codify ICWA protections on the state level. This would protect Wabanaki children, families, cultures and sovereignty, if the U.S. Supreme Court decides in June to weaken or destroy protections that have been known as the "gold standard" of child welfare policies for 40 years. (Sources: Native Organizers Alliance Action Fund and Native Americans Rights Fund.)

Please vote for LD 1970.

Thank you.
Beth Clifford
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