

Hello Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Taylor Cray, and I am the Outreach Team Leader for Preble Street Advocacy. I am writing today to ask that you please vote in favor of LD 1970: An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act.

At Preble Street, our work focuses primarily on housing, shelter, and food security. This work stems from a dedication to community and relationship-building, the nature of which requires that we identify points of connection between ourselves and others. We cannot engage in the work of community-building, particularly in social services and advocacy work, without acknowledging the ongoing harm that has been caused to many communities, including Indigenous communities, by this very work. Throughout much of history, current history included, organizations, government entities, and various other groups in positions of power have made decisions “for the benefit” of Indigenous communities, attempting to strip these communities of their autonomy, sovereignty, and cultural identity. Indigenous communities have long resisted the actions of these organizations, and it is our responsibility to stand alongside them and follow their leadership.

The current national threat to the Indian Child Welfare Act poses a great risk to indigenous sovereignty and the well-being of Indigenous people. When children are removed from their homes, it is a tragedy. When children are entirely removed from their homes, families, communities, and cultures, it is a devastating attack on the culture and leads to the erasure of a culture. We cannot stand idly by and allow ICWA to be challenged without doing everything in our power to protect indigenous children and communities.

Codifying ICWA protection in Maine State law will help to prevent the continuation of the genocidal practices that ICWA seeks to prevent. When children are removed from their homes, cultures, and families, their sense of belonging and connection to self begins to falter. As human beings, we require connection and the feeling of being interwoven with something larger than ourselves. We seek the knowledge that we are not alone in the world, that we can fall back on our community when we lose touch with ourselves. When children grow up without this connection to self and community, they face much higher risk of difficulty later in life. For children in Native communities, they are also losing the ability to continue living within their own cultural identities. This is dangerous not only for the children, but for the cultures themselves.

Indigenous communities have resisted colonial influence ever since the first contact of colonial powers to their communities. Despite continued attempts to destroy Indigenous peoples and their culture, these communities have persevered and preserved their traditions, languages, and heritage. Protecting the welfare of Indigenous children is vital to the protection of Indigenous culture. We must do everything possible to ensure that Indigenous children stay within their communities and their cultures.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Taylor Cray
Preble Street



Preble Street

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