



Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

**LD 1970: An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act**

May 31, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven mainline Protestant member-denominations and two associate member congregations who represent 437 local churches in Maine with 55,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in SUPPORT of LD 1970.**

As you know, this June, the U.S. Supreme Court may issue a decision that would weaken or destroy protections currently provided by the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), a piece of legislation that has been known for 40 years as the “gold standard” of child welfare policies. To be prepared for this eventuality, twelve other states have already acted to codify ICWA protections on the state level. Enacting LD 1970 to codify ICWA in Maine state law would protect Wabanaki children, families, culture, and sovereignty if the U.S. Supreme Court does, in fact, decide in June to weaken or destroy ICWA.

ICWA helps to create flexible foundations of culture, language and spiritual practices for children within their communities. ICWA shields Indigenous families from negative outside forces that threaten to separate them and is one way to protect them from the impacts of the systemic removal of children from their homes and nations.

The Maine Council of Churches believes it is a moral imperative that we take responsibility for and repair the centuries of harm done by Christian churches to Indigenous communities, families, and children when we facilitated removal of children from their tribal homes and culture, operated notorious “boarding schools,” and encouraged non-Native families to foster and adopt Indigenous children. This was done by churches across the United States, including here in Maine. Telling the truth about this history and making apologies, while important, are not enough. Taking responsibility and making repair includes taking action to prevent further harm. Our advocacy for a Maine Indian Child Welfare Act is one such action we, as churches, can take.

The Maine Council of Churches supports LD 1970 and urges you to vote OUGHT TO PASS.

Jane Field  
Maine Council of Churches  
LD 1970

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