



Department of the Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Testimony of Shenna Bellows Secretary of State

Testifying in Favor of
L.D. 1834 " RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of
Maine to Establish an Officer on Tribal Relations"

January 10, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State, and I am providing testimony in favor of L.D. 1834 as amended.

I am grateful to the sponsor and the committee for your interest and willingness to explore the possibility of establishing an Office on Tribal Relations within the Department of the Secretary of State. We believe it is important for this work to move forward in consultation with representatives from each Tribal Nation to ensure equity and representation.

Having the Office on Tribal Relations within the Department of the Secretary of State would be a move we fully support, and we can look to other states who have adopted similar organizational structures. Regarding the Advisory Council within the Office on Tribal Relations, we currently have models within the department that have plenty of autonomy and experience working with expert external partners – the Medical Advisory Board within the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) and the Archives Advisory Board within the Maine State Archives. Each of these boards also work closely with internal professional staff and the head of the BMV and Archives to achieve their respective goals. We could foresee this Advisory Council to operate similarly.

Additionally, we support the creation of a new deputy to serve as the executive director of the Office on Tribal Affairs. While any deputy secretary of state is by its nature an appointment at the pleasure of the Secretary in office, the custom has always been that deputy secretaries for the BMV and Corporations, Elections and Commissions (CEC) are non-partisan appointed positions, and we envision that the Deputy Secretary of State on Tribal Affairs would also be non-partisan.

Lastly, we encourage the committee to move this bill forward in tandem with L.D. 1835 so there is a streamlined avenue for tracking and participation regarding bills impacting the Tribes as well as a maintaining continuity when it comes to the Tribes sending their respective certifications to our office.

I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony, and I would be happy to answer any questions.