



**Permanent
Commission
RACIAL, INDIGENOUS
& TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

**Testimony of the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations
In Support of
LD 1970, “An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act”**

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary My name is Morgan Pottle Urquhart, I live in Bangor, and I am the Policy and Communications Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 1970, “An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act ” We extend deep gratitude to Senator Donna Bailey for her work on this bill and other tribal issues And to the Wabanaki Confederacy Tribal citizens and Indigenous people across this land, who have lived on and cared for this land since time immemorial we thank you and stand with you, today and onward

The Permanent Commission was established in 2019 as an independent entity with a mission to examine racial disparities across all systems and to specifically work at improving the status and outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the state The Permanent Commission is empowered by statute to advise and consult with all three branches of state government, as well as submit legislation Occupying a unique position in state government, the Permanent Commission represents a broad cross section of people most impacted by racial harm and colonization who have been excluded from policy making throughout Maine’s history

Like all Maine people, Wabanaki families look after each other and care for their children And like all Maine people, if a child’s home isn’t safe, they want that child to be with people who can meet their physical and emotional needs But for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, federal and state governments targeted Wabanaki and other Indigenous children to be removed from their families and their cultures, implementing a form of cultural genocide ¹

We know that many of the children taken away suffered horrific abuse in foster homes and residential schools that led to lifelong trauma, and so many tragic deaths The numbers are

¹ United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Article II (b), (e)
https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocities-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf

staggering and horrifying ^{2,3} Bias against Wabanaki families has driven disparities in the rate of children taken from Indigenous homes ⁴ In the short time the Permanent Commission has existed, we have heard first-hand accounts of this racial targeting of Indigenous families In the years just after the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed at the federal level, Maine was among the 10 states who placed Native children in foster care at the highest rates ⁴ The lesson we should take from this history is that ICWA is the bare minimum of what is needed to start to heal this generational trauma If ICWA is overturned at the federal level, Indigenous children deserve to be protected and further efforts should be made to reckon with the horrors of our past and move toward healing and change

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony and bill We respectfully urge you to support LD 1970 I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information if desired

² U S Department of the Interior Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative
<https://www.doi.gov/priorities/strengthening-indian-country/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative#~:text=%E2%80%94%94%20Secretary%20Deb%20Haaland&text=The%20purpose%20of%20federal%20Indian.languages%2C%20religions%20and%20cultural%20beliefs>

³ University of Windsor Missing Children of Indian Residential Schools 2022
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/cfe29bee35c54a70b9621349f19a3db2>

⁴ Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission Beyond the Mandate Continuing the Conversation 2015
https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/mainewabanakireach/pages/1584/attachments/original/1617238958/Full_TRC_Report_-_July_2015.pdf