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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

March 5, 2024

Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross presenting
LD 2228, An Act to Establish the Wabanaki Veterans Memorial
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government. I am Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent District 118 on the peninsula of Portland, and I serve as Speaker of the House. I am here to present **LD 2228, An Act to Establish the Wabanaki Veterans Memorial**.

The intent of this bill, quite simply, is to memorialize the contributions of Wabanaki veterans in the state of Maine with a physical memorial, to be located in Capitol Park, across from the State House. The reason is simple: I believe that Wabanaki veterans, who have made immense sacrifices in service to our state and to our country, hold a particular place and significance in that history, and should be memorialized in a way that honors their traditions and their sacrifices in service.

We should understand that from the beginning of our republic, the Wabanaki have engaged in battle on behalf of our country. On June 21, 1775, soon after the Battle of Bunker Hill in the early stages of the Revolution, Penobscot Chief Joseph Orono met with General George Washington at Watertown and agreed that his tribe's warriors, as well as others in the Wabanaki Confederacy, would join forces with the Continental Army to fight a common enemy in the struggle for freedom.¹ As American history unfolded, Native Americans continued to serve our country in force. During WWI, Native American women served in the Army Nurse Corps, and nearly 800 Native American women served with units such as the Army Corps, the Army Nurse Corps, and the WAVES throughout the duration of WWII. Members of 33 tribes served as code talkers in World War I and World War II, and more than 44,000 Native Americans served with distinction between 1941 and 1945, including members of Maine's Penobscot, Passamaquoddy,

¹ <https://digitalcommons.maine.gov/mlr/vol174/iss2/4/>

Maliseet, and Mi'kmaq tribes². Native American men and women, including those from Maine, have continued to serve in the armed forces in every war since, including Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and in current operations to enhance the security of American partners around the world.

Further, Wabanaki veterans have an active and strong presence in our state: According to the 2000 Census, 15 percent of Maine's Native American population were serving on active duty or veterans, higher than any other group. In 2019, the Department of Veterans Affairs reported 588 Native American veterans living in Maine.

Given the contributions of Wabanaki veterans to our country and our state, I believe that it is imperative that we memorialize their sacrifice, and this bill takes action to do so. This bill requires the State House and Capitol Park Commission to develop and implement a memorial to honor the Wabanaki's defense and protection of their homelands and their service in the United States Armed Forces. The bill also makes important stipulations for the project: the memorial must be in Capitol Park, it must fit within the plan for Capitol Park, which was developed by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted in 1920, and the project must be subject to available funding for the park. It's my understanding that funding would be provided largely through private donations.

In doing so, the Commission would join an important, and ongoing, project. For the past three years, following the initiation of the project by World War II veteran and Penobscot citizen Charles Shay, the Bureau of Veterans' Services has been convening the Wabanaki Veterans Memorial Committee. That group includes the Abenaki and Wabanaki leaders and representatives of the National Guard, the Maine Arts Commission, and other relevant state and federal government offices; their goal is to plan, design, and build a memorial to honor Wabanaki veterans. The Bureau of Veterans' Services and other members of the Wabanaki Veterans Memorial Committee can tell you more about that plan, which has been developed in careful consideration of Wabanaki traditions, with appropriate consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Following authorization by this bill, the State House and Capitol Park Commission would work to implement this memorial, helping to facilitate the great work already in progress by the Memorial Committee. Thus, this bill takes a necessary step towards making sure that this memorial becomes a reality.

I'll just take this moment to deeply thank Charles Shay for initiating this project, the Bureau of Veterans' Services for convening this work, and all of those who have been involved in this project thus far. Their contributions to this memorial have been immense, and I look

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<https://www.uso.org/stories/2914-a-history-of-military-service-native-americans-in-the-u-s-military-yesterday-and-today>

forward to working together to move this project forward. The sacrifices that Wabanaki veterans have made to this country, and to this state, have been immeasurable, and I believe that it is time that we honored them with a physical memorial in Capitol Park. I urge you to support this important bill, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

PROPOSED WABANAKI VETERANS' MEMORIAL
CAPITOL PARK - AUGUSTA, MAINE
MAY 2022

CENTERED AND ALIGNED WITH SUMMER SOLSTICE (JUNE 21)
AND NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS DAY
FACING EAST - STONE MATERIALS

- 5 COMMUNITIES
- MULTI-LINGUAL
- REVOLUTIONARY/CIVIL WAR
- WW I
- WW II
- KOREAN/VIETNAM
- AFGHANSTAN/IRAQ
- WOMEN VETERANS
- COMMUNITY ELDERNS
- MAINE/CANADA COMMUNITIES

OFFERING BOWL
2' X 2'

7 STANDING STONES
8' X 6" X 1'
SACRED NUMBER
CREATION STORY

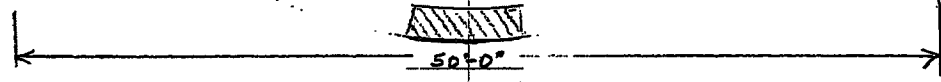
NOTES: QR CODES ON SITE
TO LEARN HISTORY AND
HEAR LANGUAGES.

WEBSITES - EACH WABANAKI
COMMUNITY AND MAINE
BUREAU VETERANS' SERVICES

SPECIAL WAMPUM BELT

1 MESSAGE OR PRAYER
REPEATED IN 5 LANGUAGES

3 BENCHES
2' X 6'



AS THE SUN RISES AND SETS
WE REMEMBER THEM

