

TESTIMONY RE: L.D. 14, An Act to Provide Indigenous People Free Access to State Parks

On Behalf of the Episcopal Diocese Committee on Indigenous Relations.

Senator Talbot Ross
Representative Pluecker

Distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

My name is Richard Farnsworth and I am here today representing the Episcopal Diocese Committee on Indigenous Relations. This is a committee that was established by the Church to deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine and to stand with the Tribes in their pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty and to support the preservation of Native languages.

L.D. 14 is a small step in the righting of a fundamental wrong, a step toward fairness and justice. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, (until 1820), and then the State of Maine, took these State Parks, historic sites, camping areas and beaches from the original inhabitants, often by force. L.D. 14 would give the descendants of the original peoples of what became the State of Maine, greater access to a portion of the land now controlled by the State, that their ancestors once occupied and depended on for survival.

Beginning in 2007, the Episcopal Diocese of Maine led the movement of Christian churches worldwide to repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery. This was a dictum, established by one of the Popes of the Roman Catholic Church in the 15th Century, giving royalty in Christian nations the authority to seize any and all lands which were not already part of the territory ruled by any other Christian monarchs. That Doctrine became the vehicle whereby England, France, Spain and Portugal laid claim to the indigenous lands in the New World including the land of the Wabanaki in Maine.

Over the centuries of European and American expansion, known as Manifest destiny, Indian nations and tribes were forcibly removed to reservations. In the case of Maine, this was done without getting the Congressional authorization required by the U. S. Constitution.

While the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act allowed the tribes to buy back small portions of the lands that were originally theirs, restrictions allowing the purchase only from willing sellers, eliminated these state owned properties not available. LD 14 would open the door to allowing our tribes free access to the lands that they could not obtain through the Settlement Act. We believe that fairness and justice would be served at, minimal cost to the State, and as a step toward mending the relationship with the State.