

April Fournier  
Portland  
LD 1970

Wednesday May 31, 2023

Ya'at'eeh shi k'ei doo shi' dine'e'  
Shí éí April yinishyé  
Honágháahnii nishłı́  
Fournier báhíshchíín  
Ákót'éego ǫ́iné asdzáán nishłı́  
T'ahdii kǫǫ honiidłǫ  
Ahéhee'

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Honorable Members of the Committee,  
My name is April Fournier, my pronouns are she/her, I am a citizen of the Navajo Nation and a resident of Portland. I am providing testimony today in support of LD1970-An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act.

My opening greeting was in my Nation's language. It's not perfect and is very hard to say. I didn't grow up speaking our language. I didn't go to ceremony. I've only really been able to access and connect to my culture since entering into adulthood. I am born for the Honaghaahnii Clan, the One Who Walks Around Clan by my mother. It's not that she didn't want to teach me, or neglected to pass on that sacred wisdom...it's because she couldn't.

In 1955 my mother was born Lorraine Virgie Wood in Ganado, Arizona on Dinetah (what we call our homeland). She grew up in their small village in the desert with her mother, aunts and grandmother and uncles, an older brother and soon a baby sister. Some of her earliest memories are playing with old coffee cans in the dirt and singing songs of our ancestors. In 1960, 18 years before the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act was passed, her older brother was away at boarding school, her baby sister still an infant and my grandmother became sick with tuberculosis. While she was very sick, the government came and told her they would take care of her daughters while she was ill, so she could get better. And when she was better, they would bring them back. She didn't see my mother or her sister for another 30 years. Their older brother came home from boarding school, 8 years old, and found his little sisters vanished.

They were given, by the government, who took guardianship of them, to a white couple from Iowa, on their way to re-settling in California. Their hair cut, their names changed, their clothing carefully picked to match and blend into a culture and community that was not their own.

My mother has been on a lifetime journey of reconnecting and repairing what was stolen. My sister and I, our children and the next generations will also have to work at something that was as easy as breathing and coded into our blood because of the acts of the government to interfere with our family.

The Federal Indian Child Welfare Act was enacted in 1978, to protect families like mine, to protect generations from losing their connection to their community, their culture, their family and their ancestors. Once again our peoples, here on the Dawnland and across this country, are threatened by a government that was never built to support us, to steal our sovereign right to care for our children, and try to make decisions for us without us. We cannot let the Supreme Court steal this protection away from our communities and must now make it happen at the State level to protect our families.

Thank you for your time and your work on behalf of our communities.

Ahé heé  
April Fournier  
Portland, ME