

The MA Indigenous Legislative Agenda Coalition is working to support legislation currently before the Massachusetts State Legislature that will benefit Indigenous Peoples. Our current Agenda includes five bills in the 2023-24 session that reflect some of the key concerns within Massachusetts.



An Act prohibiting the use of Native American mascots by public schools in the Commonwealth (S.245/H.477) Currently about 30 public high schools in the state use Native American mascots. This bill would task the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education with establishing regulations to prohibit Native American mascots in MA public schools. Decades of social science research shows that Native American mascots are harmful to both Native American and non-Native youth and perpetuate stereotypes. Five tribes in Massachusetts: the Chappaquiddick Tribe of the Wampanoag Nation, Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, and Nipmuc Nation, and, in addition, the National Congress of American Indians have called for the elimination of Native American mascots and endorsed this bill.



An Act establishing an Indigenous Peoples Day (S.1976/H.2989) This bill replaces Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in the Massachusetts General Laws. Changing the 2nd Monday in October to Indigenous People's Day acknowledges the harmful impact of celebrating Columbus as a hero. Historical accounts prove that wherever they went, Columbus and his men murdered and enslaved Indigenous People. The repercussions continue to be keenly felt even now. Indigenous Peoples Day replaces something negative with something positive - an increased awareness of Indigenous Peoples and a celebration of Indigenous resilience and survival, in MA as well as throughout the Americas.



An act relative to celebrating and teaching Native American culture and history (S.344/H.529) This bill addresses the lack of Indigenous curriculum in Massachusetts public schools. Schoolchildren rarely learn about the Native American history of the region nor about the contemporary Indigenous peoples who live here, including the Massachusett, Nipmuc, Aquinnah Wampanoag, Mashpee Wampanoag, and other bands of the Wampanoag as well as Native people in Massachusetts enrolled in tribal nations throughout the US and Canada. The goal is to develop a curriculum by working with tribal nations in-state and ensure that all children in the schools attain cultural competency in understanding Native history, cultures and current issues.



An Act providing for the creation of a permanent commission relative to the education of American Indian and Alaska Native residents of the Commonwealth (S.318/H.536) As a State Education Agency, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must engage in timely and meaningful consultation with stakeholders. Representatives of Indian tribes located in the state are explicitly identified as stakeholders. Research indicates the importance of a sustained focus on improving opportunities and outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native students, who have: 61.9% proficiency in English Language Arts; 52.6% proficiency in math; and 42.4% proficiency in science.



An Act to protect Native American Heritage (S.2186/H.3248) This bill would ensure that Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (those of cultural, traditional or historical importance to their heritage) held in governmental, municipal or non-profit collections are not sold for profit. Law enforcement efforts to preserve heritage and to deter trafficking of these objects currently rely on Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). NAGPRA currently only applies to publicly funded entities that receive federal funding. “Tribal cultural heritage belongs to the tribal community of its origin as a whole, and by tribal custom, cannot be alienated from that community by any individual or group without the expressed free, prior, and informed consent of that tribe.” Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais, Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), testifying before the US Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in 2016.

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The Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda is a collaborative effort with leadership from United American Indians of New England, North American Indian Center of Boston, MA Mascot Coalition, Italian Americans for Indigenous Peoples Day, Cultural Survival, UU Mass Action, Massachusetts Peace Action, Network for Social Justice, and other allies.

For more information and to learn more about what you can do to support these bills and Indigenous rights in Massachusetts, visit http://maindigenousagenda.org or contact info@MAIndigenousAgenda.org.