

A Resolution in Allyship with Those Working on the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda DRAFT

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The Rev. Natalie Thomas (Canonically Resident Clergy)

The Rev. Tamra Tucker (Canonically Resident Clergy) St. Mary's, Dorchester

Ms. Deborah Gardner Walker (Lay Delegate) St. Peter's, Beverly

The Rev. Dr. Regina L. Walton (Canonically Resident Clergy) Harvard Divinity School
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The Rev. Robert G. Windsor (Canonically Resident Clergy) Trinity Church, Concord

The Rev. Diane Wong (Canonically Resident Clergy) St. John's Episcopal Church,
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THE RESOLUTION

Resolved, that the 240th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts stands with Bishop Julia E. Whitworth of the Diocese of Massachusetts and Bishop Douglas J. Fisher of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts in endorsing the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda; and be it further

Resolved, that the 240th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts directs the Secretary of Convention to convey our support of the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda to the governor of Massachusetts and every state legislator representing portions of the diocese; and be it further

Resolved, that the 240th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts directs the Secretary of Convention to convey our support of the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda to the organizers of the Agenda and invite them to list the Diocese as an endorser of the Agenda; and be it further

Resolved, that the delegates to the 240th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts are urged to encourage their worshiping community leaders and individual members to communicate support of the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda to their respective state legislators.

EXPLANATION

As Bishops Whitworth and Fisher pointed out in their joint letter of June 16, 2025 (Massachusetts Episcopal Bishops Endorse the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda, June 16, 2025), “For generations we have lived, worshipped and engaged God's mission on the unceded land of native peoples. From the coastal lands of the Wampanoag, Pokanoket, Massachusett and Patuxet, to the central lands of the Nipmuc and Agawam and to the western lands of the Pocumtuc, Nonotuck, Mohican and the

Dawnland Confederacy, the artificial borders of states and dioceses have largely ignored the rights of the first people of this place. We wish for this ignorance to end in our time.”

One “outward and visible sign” of their commitment was to endorse the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda, a set of five legislative priorities identified over time by a broad body of Native people in Massachusetts. The Indigenous Legislative Agenda includes leadership from United American Indians of New England, North American Indian Center of Boston, MA Mascot Coalition, Cultural Survival, Universalist Unitarian Mass Action, Massachusetts Peace Action, Italian Americans for Indigenous Peoples Day, Network for Social Justice, and other allies.

As the organizers of the Agenda say, “For too long, Indigenous voices have been ignored in Massachusetts policies. Now, we have the chance to make real change. Our Indigenous-led coalition is pushing for five critical bills that will protect Native heritage, improve education, and end outdated racist practices...”

Their priorities include

- 1) Remove Racist Mascots: Prohibit Native American mascots in Massachusetts public schools.
- 2) Honor Indigenous People's Day: Replace Columbus Day with Indigenous People's Day to celebrate Indigenous resilience and survival. The change acknowledges the true histories of colonialism, genocide and racism that Native peoples have experienced and continue to face.
- 3) Celebrate and Teach Native American Culture & History: Ensure that schoolchildren in Massachusetts learn about Native American history, culture, and current issues.
- 4) Protect Native American Heritage: Ensure Native American funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony held in governmental or non-profit collections are not sold for profit.
- 5) Support the Education and Futures of Native Youth: Improve educational outcomes and opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students.

For more on the specific legislation on the agenda, see <http://mainindigenouagenda.org/>.

Those among us who have been exploring what allyship means have come to understand it as establishing “relationships led by Native people's experience, wisdom, desires, and goals, and the intent of this relational work is to become allies with Native people in achieving their goals.” Broadly speaking, we seek to be allies in the efforts of Native people to protect, and in some cases reestablish, their cultures and their rights and their dignity. A broad and diverse coalition of Native people have told us what that looks like legislatively in our state and they know better than “the Church” on this and other matters.

While some in our pews will likely oppose one or another of the five priorities set forth in the agenda, adopting this resolution says to our Native neighbors that as a body, The Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts stands in support of the agenda as a whole, as allies to Native people's determined priorities. As our bishops have noted, “We must care about the issues that are of utmost importance to our Indigenous neighbors and be witnesses of the injustices that still harm and scar native youth. These five pieces of legislation will make the Commonwealth of Massachusetts a safer, healthier, more respectful environment for native people.” (Massachusetts Episcopal Bishops Endorse the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda, June 16, 2025)

By passing this resolution, the 240th Annual Diocesan Convention will stand with our bishops to say that we support “the rights of Indigenous people to be the stewards of their own culture and the keepers of their own sacred stories. This is our first step, but it will not be our last.” (Massachusetts Episcopal Bishops Endorse the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda, June 16, 2025)

STATEMENT AGAINST

The church should not be political. We should stay out of legislative matters. Let individual Episcopalians decide how to vote without the interference of their Church leaders telling us what we should support. In addition, Native mascots are seen by many as a way of honoring Native people, not degenerate them. People need to understand that and not be so sensitive or quick to take offense. Finally, some Italian Americans see the elimination of the recognition of Christopher Columbus and the beginning of transatlantic settler colonialism as a dishonor to their heritage.

IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

The Secretary of Convention will communicate the diocese's support of the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda to the Governor and every state legislator representing portions of the diocese as well as the organizers of the Massachusetts Indigenous Legislative Agenda. Convention delegates will not be required to but will be urged to encourage their worshiping community's leaders and members to contact their state legislators in support of the Agenda.