



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING &
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES
COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Maura T. Healey, Governor ♦ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Juana B. Matias, Secretary ♦ John Peters, Jr., Executive Director

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

Monday, August 17, 2026 2:00 PM

Meeting held via Zoom, facilitated by Commissioner Gonzales

Commissioners Present: Tashanna Carter, Aaron Gonzales, and Troy Phillips, Chairman.

Commissioners Absent: Rhonda Anderson, Gail Hill, and Mike Wagner.

Staff: John "Jim" Peters, Executive Director; and Burne Stanley, Part-time Administrative Assistant.

Others: Numerous community members attended this virtual meeting.

1. Opening

Comm. Phillips called the meeting to order at 2:05 PM. He offered a prayer, followed by a moment of silence in remembrance of several elders in the community who recently passed. He then conducted a roll call of Commissioners and staff. Due to the lack of a quorum, no official business was conducted.

2. Update on the Massachusetts State Seal, Flag and Motto

Comm. Phillips called upon Ms. Elizabeth Solomon who sits on the State Seal, Flag and Motto Advisory Commission to provide an update on the status of their work. Ms. Solomon offered some background and historical context on the legislative effort and an overview of where it sits today. For 50 years, there had been a push to change the state flag and seal. For 30 years there had been legislation introduced to make that change. It wasn't until 4 years ago that meaningful process was made when the Legislature finally passed a bill establishing the Advisory Commission.

The Commission, set up over two years ago, was charged with conducting a statewide review and developing recommendations for a new seal, flag and motto. The legislation also requested recommendations for an educational component addressing the history and meaning of the existing seal and motto.

Ms. Solomon explained that after the initial Advisory Commission completed its work and issued its final report, a second Commission was formed one year later. It included Native representatives such as Summer Confuorto, Rhonda Anderson, Jim Peters, and Ms. Solomon herself.

Ms. Solomon feels strongly that any decision-making by the initial Advisory Commission be put on hold until the educational component of their report is put out to the public first. She stressed that it's important that the seal, flag and motto reflect the values and goals of the state and the people. She also emphasized that the educational piece also provides a teachable moment and a valuable opportunity for conversations among the residents of the Commonwealth about Native history, values and aspirations, and the symbols that best represent them.

Ms. Solomon concluded her update stating that the Advisory Commission is at an inflection point right now with state co-chairs pushing for a resolution. She would like to see more engagement from the Native communities as the process moves forward.

Akuahah Wheaton, Nipmuc, raised what she considers a legal concern related to the state seal and there being a Native on the State Seal. She wonders how they're going to meet with the Governor or her staff and stressed the importance of ensuring that the Advisory Commission is in compliance with this matter. She also expressed a desire to see more Natives on the Advisory Commission.

Ms. Solomon ended the discussion with the following:

- To her knowledge, there are no meetings of the Advisory Commission currently scheduled.
- Visit the State Advisory Commission website for updates on ongoing developments
- The timeline is short.
- Help apply pressure on government agencies to slow things down.

3. Other Business

Jim announced that Comm. Carter will be leaving the Commission on Indian Affairs as due to her upcoming move. He said that the Commission extends its best wishes to her in her new endeavors and that the Commission will begin the process to replace her.

Comm. Phillips reported that he recently visited the Rhode Island Indian Council (RIIC). He shared that Darrel Waldron, the Executive Director, informed him of several opportunities available through RIIC, including educational programs and employment opportunities in fields such as electricity and carpentry, all of which offer full benefits. Comm. Phillips encouraged community members to reach out to Mr. Waldron if they have children who may benefit from any of these opportunities. Although the funding originates in Rhode Island, Mr. Waldron indicated that assistance may still be available to Massachusetts residents.

Nichol Brewer-Lowry, Director of Native American LifeLines of Boston, added that their organization refers individuals to RIIC and noted that RIIC can help community members from both federal and state tribes.

Comm. Philips adjourned the meeting at 3:09 PM.

Submitted by Burne Stanley and Jim Peters