



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

Maura T. Healey, Governor ♦ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Edward M. Augustus, Jr., Secretary ♦ John Peters, Jr., Executive Director

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

Monday, June 2, 2025 2:00 PM

Zoom was facilitated by Commissioner Anderson

Commissioners Present: Rhonda Anderson, Tashanna Carter, Gail Hill, and Troy Phillips, Chairman.

Commissioners Absent: Aaron Gonzales and Mike Wagner.

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

Comm. Phillips called the meeting to order at 2:03 PM and offered a prayer. Following the prayer was a roll call of Commissioners and staff. Comm. Phillips then asked for a moment of silence for those we've lost in our community.

1. Tribal Affiliation for Data Standards Presentation.

Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Member, Cheryl Cromwell, the Tribal and Indigenous Health Equity Strategist at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) joined us again to give a presentation on Tribal-Indigenous data standards. Several of her colleagues attended in support of this effort and introduced themselves. They included: Ryan Burke, Humberto Reynoso, Arielle Coq, Sargam Ghimire, Melissa Charles, and Rumi-Pavlova-Plotrik.

Ryan Burke led the presentation. Through a slide, he shared a list of local tribes they are working with. Because not all the tribes have been identified yet, it asks that you write in yours if you don't see it listed.

He made two important points:

* They need to update DPH's data system to collect tribal data. This significant step would be achieved with input from and in consultation with the tribes.

* They need to improve data access by making sure data is not hidden or suppressed.

Outreach is being done by Cheryl. She informed us that on Friday, June 16th at 1PM a meeting is scheduled for tribal leaders and Native serving organizations. The purpose of the meeting is to get the perspective and impact of data from tribal folks. She will send us the meeting notice.

2. Update on Indigenous Peoples Legislative Agenda

Comm. Anderson gave a summary of the Indigenous Peoples Legislative Agenda which includes 5 legislative bills. She reported that:

* On May 12th there was a “Day of Action” held at the State House. There was a strong educational showing of folks to help get the 5 bills passed. She gave a huge thanks to Senator Comerford and Representative Fluker-Reid who are supporters of the bills.

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

* On May 12th, members of the different groups went to each of their representatives and invited them to the briefing that was held in Room 428.

* Speakers that day included: Jean-Luc Pierite (NAICOB), Faries Grey (Massachusetts Tribe at Ponkapoag); Melissa Ferretti (Herring Pond Wampanoag); Shawna Newcomb (Mashpee Wampanoag); Brittney Walley, (Nipmuc); Reggie Alkiewicz (Inuk of Nunavut); Laurel Davis Delano (MA Anti-Mascot Coalition); and Rhonda Anderson (Iñupiaq, Western Mass Commissioner on Indian Affairs).

* The Indigenous Legislative Agenda for 2025-2026 includes the following 5 priorities:

- **An Act prohibiting the use of Native American mascots by public schools in the Commonwealth.** [H.575/S.312](#) (Fluker-Reid/Comerford) Currently about 25 public high schools in the state have Native American sports mascots. This bill ends that practice.
- **An Act establishing an Indigenous Peoples Day** [H.3292/ S.2113](#) (Barber/Comerford) This bill replaces Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day in the Massachusetts General Laws. It’s a 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.

- **An act relative to celebrating and teaching Native American cultures and history.** [H.628/ S.444](#) (Lewis/Rausch) This bill addresses the lack of Indigenous curriculum in Massachusetts public schools. It ensure that school children in Massachusetts learn about Native American history, culture, 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.** [H.649/S.412](#) (Montaño/Miranda) 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. The Act would improve educational outcomes and opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students.
- **An Act to protect Native American Heritage.** [H.3597/S.2335](#) (Rogers/Biele, Miranda) This 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.

* During the Day of Action, they were able to get more co-signers for the bills.

To get updates on these bills, visit their website: Mainindigenousagenda.org

3. Update on Special Commission of the Mass. State Seal

* Jim reported that over the last month, the Committee talked about opening up the process to others to share ideas. They had been struggling about whether to continue with a Native theme or not. Jim went on record to remove the sword and change the motto.

* Elizabeth Solomon added that the Native man on the state seal is a non-starter for an image. She stated her willingness to be part of a group from the Native communities who may want to get together to come up with an idea. This way, what's decided as a group can be conveyed to the state.

4. Update on MA 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution

* Jim said this has been a frustrating process. He feels that there isn't much interest from the Native communities regarding the Revolutionary War and America's 350th anniversary. They might not know this history and how many Natives were involved in the wars. It is an important opportunity and hopes that some of Natives, and Tribes would make an effort, to research history, and participate in the development of the events that share their stories with the State and the world

* Peter Silva gave a summary of Minuteman Joseph Anthony a Hassanamsit tribal member who was with 77 others at Lexington Center Green in 1775 entering the battle against a company of British Army regulars to witness that shot heard around the world. Later that day, he found himself with 6 other Nipmucs and 400 Minutemen on the Concord Bridge forcing the retreat of a 700-man British regiment.

* Elizabeth Solomon requested that Jim re-send the information that asks for presentations for MA 250.

5. Gathering of the People

* Jim reported that the Tribal listening sessions that were conducted in conjunction with Suffolk University Law School's Indigenous Peoples Clinic, and the Institute for New England Native American Studies at UMass/Boston, provided several results - Priority is Unity and Healing among Tribal Communities; there's too many differences between tribes that need to be reconciled; there's so much division, even among tribes; there's trauma between ourselves and the infighting is a huge barrier to our growth and continuance. A formal report of the listening sessions will come out soon.

* It was proposed that there be a gathering of the people, similar to the listening sessions, to find out where people are and to talk about internal issues. Jim said we need to figure out where we're going. How do we work together as there's too few of us.

* Comm. Phillips said it's time to sit down with the communities, share thoughts and talk about how to move forward together in peace. He suggested that they find a place to hold the gathering, find funding, etc.

* Comm. Anderson mentioned that there is a Peacemaking Presentation through the listening sessions. She said that funding is available for intertribal peacemaking through NARF (Native American Rights Fund). She added that sitting down, finding common ground, listening is so important. And added that all must be unified to move forward.

6. Public Comments

* Jose "Ite" Santana is interested in learning about the process to become a member of the Commission on Indian Affairs and asked to be directed to the information. Comm. Phillips suggested that he contact Burne if interested. Jim added that there are 4 seats designated for tribes and 3 seats designated for other areas across the state. The process involves a CORI check.

* Love Richardson asked if Jim is retiring and if so, is there a plan in place? Is someone being prepped to take his place? Jim responded that this is a state employee position and the hiring goes through our HR Department once his resignation is submitted.

* Elizabeth Solomon said she is looking at the Commission's website and sees the names of the Commissioners, their areas of representation but nothing about the process of becoming a Commissioner. She requested that something be added on the website regarding the process to apply for a Commission seat. She would also like to see the terms of the current Commissioners.

* Chuck Morse mentioned that the list of state tribes isn't on the website. He saw it months ago but it has disappeared.

* Liz Santana made a comment that they are all Nipmucs. How is one band state recognized and the others not.

* Akuahah Wheaton stated that there are 30 bands of Nipmucs. The Hassanamisco, the Chaubunagungamaug, and the Natick have a government. The others don't have an active, organized government. The Nipmuc Nation is not a tribe, it's a government.

* Love Richardson agrees with Liz and stated that there's an abuse of power. She mentioned that Jim said he would follow NCAI rules as it relates to splinter groups. She feels there's favoritism here and that it's egregious. She said they would like to have a conversation with the Commission and wants to know how they can plan ahead to have their voice heard. She added that the current Nipmuc Commissioner doesn't meet with them.

Comm. Philips adjourned the meeting at 4:00 PM.

Submitted by Burne Stanley and Jim Peters