

Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 17, 2025; 11:00AM

Commission Members in Attendance via Zoom:

- Patrick Tutwiler, Secretary, Executive Office of Education, Co-Chair
- Kate Fox, Executive Director, Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism, Co-Chair
- Lilia Melikechi, Communications and Training Manager, Massachusetts Office on Disability
- Summer Confuorto, Traditional Arts Programs Officer, Massachusetts Cultural Council
- Elizabeth Solomon, Member chosen by the Executive Director of the Commission on Indian Affairs
- Rhonda Anderson, Member chosen by the Governor
- Ben Haley, National Register Director at the Massachusetts Historical Commission
- Brian Boyles, Executive Director, Mass Humanities
- Jim Peters, Executive Director, Commission on Indian Affairs
- Dr. John D. Warner, Jr., State Archivist, Secretary of State or Designee

Opening Remarks:

- Co-Chair **Ms. Fox** opened the meeting of the Seal, Flag, and Motto Advisory Commission at 11:01AM
- **Ms. Fox**- took a roll call
- **Ms. Fox**- announced that the meeting is being recorded
- **Ms. Fox**- called for a review of the meeting minutes and entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting which occurred on August 28, 2025
- Motion passed, roll call taken, and meeting minutes approved at 11:04AM.
- **Ms. Fox**- noted that the minutes would be posted on the website mass.gov/sealflagmotto

Remarks from Co-Chairs:

- **Mr. Tutwiler**- thanked Commissioners for their thoughtful care and attention to this work and recognized the work of the Education Subcommittee. He continued to note that he believes this work is about recognizing that symbols matter and providing an opportunity to do better, acknowledge our history in Massachusetts in its entirety, and be informative of the origins and evolution of the Massachusetts seal, flag, and motto so that the public can better understand. Mr. Tutwiler stated that the Executive Office is in the process of seeking more time to complete the Commission's work, and then turned it over to Jim Peters to provide an overview of the Contemporary Tribal Landscape in Massachusetts 2025
- **Mr. Peters**- thanked the group for the opportunity to talk about the Tribes that have survived in Massachusetts, and over the course of time. Mr. Peters discussed the extensive histories of the federally recognized tribes, the State Recognized Tribes, historic tribes of Massachusetts found in the 1861 Earle report to the Senate. Additionally, Mr. Peters presented on the histories of other Tribes, their current statuses,

recognition efforts, leadership and communities. Lastly, Mr. Peters provided a brief overview of state-recognized tribes in the United States

- **Mr. Tutwiler-** asked if Commissioners had any questions
- **Ms. Fox-** thanked Mr. Peters for providing this information and overview
- **Ms. Solomon-** thanked Mr. Peters for the brief overview and stated that folks should understand that the process of being recognized by the state or federal government is fraught and expensive, and in addition noted its complicated history
- **Mr. Peters-** reiterated the interesting history of all the Tribes discussed

Education Subcommittee Presentation:

- **Mr. Tutwiler-** provided commentary on the slides included in the Education Subcommittee's presentation. Slides detailed the origins and history of the seals and flags of Massachusetts and their evolution over time, including the current seal and flag of Massachusetts. Mr. Tutwiler also detailed the history of the movement of activists to alter the flag. He went on to discuss the legislation filed which culminated with the first commission created in 2021 and concluded in 2023, which brings us to the current moment and present day efforts
- **Ms. Solomon-** stated that she would like to discuss the differences between the seal and flag and noted that Massachusetts didn't have an official flag until 1908. She went on to state that she wanted to make sure that folks knew that the flag imagery was based upon the seal
- **Mr. Peters-** spoke to the meaning of the Standish sword
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she appreciates the group bringing light to this history, and believes that education on the symbols and meanings are essential to healing
- **Mr. Tutwiler-** acknowledged those on the Education Subcommittee that helped bring the group to this moment, and asked if there were other questions or comments
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she believes that the educational elements should take place before the public forums
- **Mr. Tutwiler-** reiterated that the public hearings are foundational for information sharing, which he believes to be important

Discussion Regarding Symbolism & Representation and Rescoring of Round 2 Submissions:

- **Ms. Fox-** thanked the members of the Education Subcommittee and members of the Commission for their work and noted that several Commissioners have expressed concerns about the impact of rubric weights on the round 2 scoring process, with a desire to ensure that the representation categories on rubrics held equal weight with design features. Ms. Fox continued to note that the plan moving forward would be to:
 - Re-score the round 2 submissions with recalibrated rubrics
 - Add new submissions to existing round 3 submissions
 - Send Commissioners a survey monkey form for rescoring round 2 submissions, to complete by 5pm on Friday, January 9, 2026, with submissions being added to round 3 slates presented at the next Commission meetingMs. Fox noted that the Commission would keep existing round 3 submissions that give equal weight to representation and design features
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she has asked notaries what makes a good seal and reported that they said that it has to be complicated and can't be replicated. She went on to note that she believes the seal should be representative of the many different features that

make Massachusetts great, and believes that there needs to be adjustment on the seal, and that the flag should be simple, but not the seal

- **Ms. Solomon-** stated that she believes that representation is incredibly important and noted that Native people have started the push to change the flag, and that many Native people feel that there should be some element of some Native representation on the flag. She continued to note that she believes that having the state flag go from problematic representation to no representation will cause harm, and that the native community is concerned about this. Ms. Solomon stated that her goal is to have something that is representative of all people in Massachusetts, which has also been home to indigenous people for more than 10,000 years, and reiterated that the group should be cognizant in putting forth symbolism that recognizes that and does not erase it
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she believes that part of the educational piece should include Native appropriation, as well as education on cultural appropriation
- **Mr. Tutwiler-** echoed Ms. Anderson's points
- **Ms. Fox-** inquired whether Commission members had additional comments or would like to speak about the challenges of representation and appropriation and share perspective that would be helpful in the rescoring of round 2 submissions
- **Ms. Solomon-** stated that she believes that it is striking to her that submissions received include Revolutionary symbolism and noted that it does not have the same meaning for Native people that it does for people of the dominant society. Additionally, Ms. Solomon discussed the history behind the causes of the Revolution. Ms. Solomon went on to state that folks should be cognizant that Revolutionary imagery does not represent the entire community of Massachusetts and also asked that Commissioners be cognizant of what might make a difference such as highlighting multiplicity of the people that call Massachusetts home and feel very strongly about it
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she believes that the Commission needs to revisit the rubric to ensure that it is suitable for both the seal and the flag, and to ensure that there isn't cultural or Native appropriation. She continued to note that there are thousands of cultural communities which are not represented by arrows or feathers
- **Mr. Peters-** spoke about the history of his father initiating the discussion of changing the flag and the seal years ago, and that the group should discuss what represents the population and what it really means
- **Ms. Melikechi-** inquired as to what sort of imagery Tribes use to represent themselves and noted that she is interested in learning more about what colors symbolize to Indigenous people
- **Ms. Anderson-** stated that she believes these teachings should be part of the curriculums in the Massachusetts school system, and went on to note that she believes that someone can only learn so much from an image
- **Ms. Solomon-** inquired whether the Commission would have the opportunity to review the new rubric before moving forward
- **Ms. Fox-** stated that it would be loaded into the new survey monkey, and that the adjusted weighting in the rubrics would be shared for review

Adjournment:

- **Ms. Fox-** made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and a roll call was taken; the motion was seconded and passed unanimously
- The meeting was adjourned at **12:06PM**

Action Items and Next Steps:

- **Ms. Fox-** stated that she will send a follow-up email sharing:
 1. The document on Contemporary Tribal Landscape in Massachusetts 2025, presented by Commission member Jim Peters
 2. Information on the new slate of entries, the new rubric, and the survey monkey tool will be shared at the beginning of January