



The North American Indian Center of Boston

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Post-Primary Election Call to Action for Native American Rights

Jamaica Plain, MA – In a letter to Chairman Cedric Cromwell, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, Department of Interior asserts the determination that the federal government does not have the authority to take land into trust for the Tribe. Because the Tribe did not fall under federal jurisdiction prior to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Mashpee Wampanoag do not meet the federal definition of “Indian.” This is not only devastating for the Mashpee Wampanoag, it also demonstrates the alarming trend by the Trump Administration to revisit the Termination Era.

A coalition of Massachusetts legislators seek to remedy the situation with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe Reservation Reaffirmation Act, introduced into the House by Rep. William Keating and co-sponsored by ousted Rep. Michael Capuano. The determination by the Department of Interior should lend further resolve to the coalition and its allies. Furthermore, it should be a priority of newly elected Ayanna Pressley to continue the staunch advocacy of Michael Capuano for the rights of Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, the constituency must take action. As Chairman Cromwell asks, “I am asking people of good will and all those concerned with justice for the indigenous people of this land -- the first Americans -- to stand with us in calling on Congress to protect our reservation and ensure we are don’t become the first Tribe since the dark days of the Termination Era to lose its land.”

Post-primary, the fight to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples continues in Boston. Jeff Sanchez, Byron Rushing, and Michael Capuano have been staunch allies for those rights and the New England Native American community. As we welcome Nika Elugardo, Jon Santiago, and Ayanna Pressley to these posts; it is important to the North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) to thank their predecessors for their advocacy. There is also a need for a call to action. As Ayanna Pressley asserts, “Change can’t wait.” It is on the constituency to empower and to support these candidates. Otherwise, important initiatives may fall behind due to lack of clout or any other such dismissal of a bold change in leadership.

In collaboration with Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services, NAICOB worked with the Native American Team Project. Through this project, the intertribal community developed a curriculum based on traditional and ancestral knowledge to combat what we frame as the “Culture of Addiction.” Weekly, we participate in conference calls in which we discuss outreach efforts to confront the effects of drugs and

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violence. No politician could understand the consequences of not doing this work more than Jeff Sanchez. Rep. Sanchez has been empathetic to our organization's message. He recently entered language into an appropriations bill for capital improvements that will provide for the redesign and redevelopment of our center in Jamaica Plain. While that bill was signed into law by Gov. Baker, we still need advocacy to be sure that this project is shortlisted. In addition, the criminal justice reform bill championed by Rep. Sanchez includes the promotion of restorative justice practices. Such practices are based on the traditional and ancestral knowledge of our peoples. Nika Elugardo has voiced her support of our work. So, we are counting on her to push forward the work of Jeff Sanchez. On the local level, we are eager to work with Rachael Rollins for a more equitable and just Boston.

Often our issues are relegated to matters of representation. How our community is perceived impacts our health. Thankfully, we have allies such as Linda Thomas who petitioned Babara L'Italien to present a bill banning Native mascots in Massachusetts public schools. Previously, the NAICOB Board of Directors issued a statement condemning the use of Native mascots. Such imagery contributes to disproportionate levels of suicide among our youth. Beyond mascots, the flag of the Commonwealth bears the image of an Ojibwe man with a sword above his head. Rep. Byron Rushing, who has stood shoulder to shoulder with our community, pushed for a commission including three of our community members to advise on a revision to the seal of the commonwealth. We call upon Rep. Rushing's newly-elected successor, Jon Santiago, to take on these matters of representation to help restore dignity to our youth and our community. Earlier this year, NAICOB concluded Circles of Support which was a program funded through the Department of Justice. We produced a resource guide and held regular meeting for Indigenous women who were affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. Rep. Michael Capuano was an ally in Congress who co-sponsored the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2018. In 2012, he voted against a deviation of VAWA that would abridge protections for Indigenous women. Cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are epidemic. We still don't have complete data due to challenges with reporting across government agencies. That said, we live with the consequences of not doing the work.

In addition to protecting our women, Rep. Capuano has been a champion in protecting our sacred sites. Nationally, Rep. Capuano has co-sponsored the Bears Ears National Monument Expansion Act. He has kept the Native American community informed of the Trump Administration's efforts to undo protections to our sacred sites. As stated above, the determination by the Department of Interior makes legislative reaffirmation of the Mashpee Wampanoag tribal lands imperative. Congress must also pass a legislative fix to *Carcieri v. Salazar*. There is proposed fix in the Tribal Recognition Act. We can not accept such a poison pill that would divest recognition authority from the Secretary of Interior and leave the authority solely to an act of Congress. NAICOB joins with the Mashpee Wampanoag in calling for reaffirmation and protection of lands, in the interest of beneficial government to government relationships. We call upon Ayanna Pressley to continue to push for protections of our women and our lands.

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At NAICOB, we are committed to providing cultural, social, educational, and professional related services to the New England Native American community. We have done so for nearly 50 years. Because the political borders of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts shifted historically, this resulted in government to government relationships with Indigenous nations such as: Massachusett, Nipmuck, Wampanoag, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, Maliseet, and Mi'kmaq. As Boston's oldest Urban Indian Center, we serve a diverse community of members of Indigenous nations throughout the United States, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians; all who reside in Massachusetts seeking to empower themselves towards economic development. In recent years, the Board of Directors expanded our mission to improve the quality of life of Indigenous peoples, lest we forget our Central and South American siblings who seek asylum in Massachusetts escaping the cycles of violence against Indigenous peoples.

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