

RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CHANGING THE STATE FLAG & SEAL OF MASSACHUSETTS

BOSTON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Whereas the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Colonists at Plymouth Plantation, which gave rise to the long chain of genocidal wars and deliberate government policies of cultural destruction against Native Nations of this continent, occurred in the year 2020, affording every citizen of the Commonwealth a chance to reflect upon this history and come to an appreciation of the need for better relations between the descendants of the colonial immigrants and the Native Nations of the Commonwealth;

Whereas the history of relations between Massachusetts since Colonial times and the Native Nations who continue to live within its borders includes the forced internment of thousands of so-called “praying Indians” on Deer Island, in Boston Harbor, where they died by the hundreds of exposure in the winter of 1675, the enslavement of Indigenous people in Boston, Bermuda, and the Caribbean Islands, the offering of 40 pounds sterling as bounty for the scalps of Indigenous men, women and children in Massachusetts beginning in 1686, increased to 100 pounds sterling for the scalps of Indigenous adult males by 1722, and half that amount for Indigenous women and children;

Whereas the land area now known as the City of Boston, shares a rich Native history with modern tribal Nations such as the Massachusett Tribe at Ponkapoag, who inhabited this area for thousands of years before the first colonial settlers arrived, in 1630;

Whereas the flag and motto of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should symbolize our collective will and capacity to live together, in a united political community with liberty and justice for all, and should not inflict harm, threaten, insult, or demean any group of residents of Massachusetts;

Whereas the current seal and motto of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were last updated, without public input from its residents, in 1898, and exhibits features (the sword, the figure of the Native American, and the motto) which celebrate the violence perpetuated by settlers against Native American populations of Massachusetts;

Whereas the design of the current flag and motto of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts insult, demean and harm the history and dignity on the Indigenous peoples of Massachusetts, and therefore does not embody the Commonwealth's contemporary commitment to peace, justice, liberty, and equality for all;

Whereas on January 11, 2021, Governor Baker appointed Special Commission Relative to the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth to investigate the features of the official seal and motto of the commonwealth and to examine and study the seal and motto of the commonwealth to ensure that they faithfully reflect and embody the historic and contemporary commitments of the commonwealth to peace, justice, liberty, and equality and to spreading the opportunities and advantages of education; and

Whereas in 2023 the Special Commission recommended that Massachusetts create a new design for the seal and motto of the Commonwealth because "the current seal and motto do not reflect and embody the historic and contemporary commitments of the commonwealth to peace, justice, liberty, and equality," and that "a new seal should be commissioned through a public request for proposals that seeks a professional designer."

Be it resolved that the Boston Human Rights Commission (BHRC)

1. supports the work of the Special Commission Relative to the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth, established by a Resolve of the General Court in 2021 and appointed by the Governor to recommend changes to the current flag and seal of Massachusetts; and,
2. urges the design of new seal and motto for the Commonwealth that better represents Massachusetts' aspirations for harmonious and respectful relations between all people who now call Massachusetts home.
3. advocates for a public and inclusive redesign process of the state flag and seal. Such process would actively engage a diverse group of stakeholders, including Native American tribes, artists, historians, educators, and the broader public, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of all historically marginalized groups are central to the creative process and fostering a shared vision for a flag and seal that are reflective of our principles and aspirations as a Commonwealth committed to Human Rights.
4. advises the establishment of an educational initiative to accompany the redesign process. This initiative would provide resources and programming

aimed at informing residents of the Commonwealth about the historical context and significance of the current flag and seal, as well as the impetus for change. Through various mediums such as public forums, educational materials, and digital campaigns, the initiative would endeavor to foster knowledge, understanding, dialogue and respect for Human Rights.

The Boston Human Rights Commission shall forward a copy of this Resolution to Sen. Nick Collins and Rep. Antonio Cabral, co-chairs of the Joint Committee on State Administration, who served as members of the *Special Commission Relative to the Seal and Motto of the Commonwealth*, and to Representatives Adrian Madaro Dan Ryan, Aaron Michlewitz David Biele Liz Miranda, Russell Holmes Chynah Tyler, Jay Livingstone, Jon Santiago, Edward Coppinher, Brandy Fluker Oakley, Daniel Hunt, and Rob Consalvo; and Senators Lydia Edwards Sal DiDomenico, William Brownsberger, and Michael Rush, with the request that they support the work of the aforementioned Special Commission and a new flag and seal for the Commonwealth.

The Boston Human Rights Commission shall also forward this Resolution to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, and to the members of the Boston City Council, Ruthzee Louijeune (President), Gabriela Coletta, Julia Mejía, Benjamin Weber, Tania Fernandes-Anderson, Brian Worrell, Erin Murphy, Enrique Pepen, Sharon Durkan, Edward Flynn, Liz Breadon with the request that they consider joining in support of the work of the Special Commission.

Signed on this 8th day of May, Two Thousand Twenty-Four

Reyes Coll-Tellechea, Chair
Elijah Evans, Commissioner
Tre'Andre Valentine, Commissioner

Anne Rousseau, Commissioner
Robert McEachern, Commissioner
Leonard Lee, Commissioner