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Date: 10/2/23

RE: Written Testimony on Behalf of Indigenous Peoples Day  
(S.1976/H.2989)

Thank you Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify through this email letter, as well as for all the dedicated work you do on behalf of our Commonwealth.

My name is Rev. Dr. Michelle Walsh, and I am the co-lead minister with my spouse, the Rev. Dr. Clyde E. Grubbs, of the First Parish Unitarian Universalist in Canton, MA. We are both also residents of Quincy, MA and members of the coalition of organizations represented by UU Mass Action in support of the indigenous legislative agenda. My spouse Clyde also is of indigenous Texas Cherokee heritage. In Canton and Quincy, we reside on the traditional homeland of the Neponset Band of the Massachusetts Tribe.

I (we) are testifying in support of An Act establishing an Indigenous Peoples Day (S.1976/H.2989), and I (we) hope you vote it out of committee favorably.

For my spouse, this is personal to his heritage – for myself, I am deeply concerned for generations of children here in MA who are being taught history that is incorrect. Columbus committed great atrocities against indigenous peoples, and we do a great dishonor to all of our MA children by not educating them and ourselves on this true history. I am particularly dismayed that so many other states already have taken this action, while we in MA lag behind, driving many MA cities and towns to take it into their own hands to recognize and honor Indigenous Peoples Day. Today, I witness to this as a great moral issue for the sake of truth in education minimally, but I personally also witness to the climate crisis being intertwined with our failure to educate properly in this area as well.

**Environmental justice is deeply intertwined with indigenous history and justice.** Leading climate scientists from the International Panel on

Climate Change (IPCC) have noted the links between our current climate crisis and colonialism in the legacies left. It is crucial that we teach indigenous history properly in our schools and reclaim a proper moral perspective in relationship to Columbus and our country. Here is a link to an article about the IPCC report that may be of interest to you: <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-why-leading-climate-scientists-have-finally-acknowledged-its-link-with-climate-change-181642>. Here is one paragraph excerpt from this article:

Connecting climate change to such acts of colonization involves recognizing that historic injustices are not consigned to history: their legacies are alive in the present. Researchers have shown, for example, that the scale of bushfires in Australia today – including the catastrophic [fires of 2019-20](#) – is not being exacerbated by climate change alone. It's also amplified by the colonial displacement of Indigenous people from their lands and the disruption of their land management practices that skillfully used controlled burning to help landscapes flourish.

Yet another article referencing this same IPCC report points out that indigenous knowledge is crucial in helping to combat climate change: <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/how-indigenous-knowledge-can-help-us-combat-climate-change>. This article points out that “Although they only make up 5% of the world population, Indigenous peoples **protect 80% of global biodiversity**.” Building on the above point about managing forest fires, this article goes on to reference the California wildfire management:

**Climate change is a** major factor, but so is **poor forest management**. That's because the state of California (and the rest of the United States) had largely banned one of the most effective forest management practices: low-intensity fires.... In recent years, California seems to have come around on prescribed burns.

The state government has even been working with Native tribes to use this traditional practice to help mitigate fires. That's good news and all, but we can't forget that when the government imposed these bans and stripped Native tribes of their land, they lost a large part of their culture.

We have to keep in mind that to recognize and utilize Indigenous land and resource management practices means that we have to grapple with the history of harm the government inflicted on these communities.

If we are all to survive the current climate crisis, from which no part of our country or state will be immune, then we need to be in partnership with indigenous communities to teach and draw on indigenous wisdom in significantly larger ways than we currently are doing. And in doing so, we as a country and as this Commonwealth, DO "need to grapple with the history of harm" our government as inflicted on indigenous communities. Honoring Indigenous Peoples Day in MA is one large step toward establishing right moral relationship with indigenous peoples who are still here continuing to protect the lands they have stewarded faithfully for centuries. We must honor our history accurately for the sake of our children but also for the future of our shared survival.

Thank you again for the work that you do. I (we) urge you to vote this bill out favorably. I (we) are happy to answer any questions as best I (we) can.

Sincerely,

*Rev. Dr. Michelle A. Walsh and Rev. Dr. Clyde E. Grubbs*

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Co-Lead Ministers, The First Parish UU in Canton, MA