



Statement from the Episcopal Bishops of New England on the Disestablishment of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe

Easter 2020

The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, the People of the First Light, have lived in what is now known as southeastern New England for 12,000 years. Four hundred years ago they sheltered pilgrims in need of refuge and care. After giving that precious gift of hospitality, the Mashpee Wampanoag endured and overcame generations of persecution, oppression and marginalization. Today they are threatened with having their reservation lands taken out of trust and being disestablished by the United States government in their own homeland.

As Christians, we are called by Christ to love our neighbors as ourselves and to grow as a community rooted in love. As Episcopalians, we are called by the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, the Most Rev. Michael Curry, to work towards a beloved community of racial healing, reconciliation and justice. In this season of Easter in which we celebrate Christ's Resurrection, we celebrate the Creator's power of resurrection, justice and love over the powers of death, oppression and empire. In that spirit, we cannot and must not ignore what is happening to the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe today.

On March 27, 2020, Chairman Cedric Cromwell/Qaqeemasq wrote: "At 4:00 pm today -- on the very day that the United States has reached a record 100,000 confirmed cases of the coronavirus and our Tribe is desperately struggling with responding to this devastating pandemic -- the Bureau of Indian Affairs informed me that the Secretary of the Interior has ordered that our reservation be disestablished and that our land be taken out of trust. Not since the termination era of the mid-twentieth century has a Secretary taken action to disestablish a reservation... It begs the question, what is driving our federal trustee's crusade against our reservation?"

Vice Chairwoman Jesse Little Doe Baird spoke in a statement on March 29, 2020, about the injustice of removing land out of trust for the tribe and putting tribal housing, language and school programs in dire risk. She called for the public to reach out and support the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe by contacting the Senate and the Secretary of the Interior.

The Episcopal Church [renounced the Doctrine of Discovery](#) and expressed solidarity with indigenous peoples. At the same time, we acknowledge that we have made our own mistakes in the past, rooted in colonization, selfishness and prejudice in mistreating the Wampanoag people and the many indigenous peoples of this land. In the Gospels (Mark 2:17), Jesus Christ called his followers to *metanoia*-that is to repentance-to a change in direction and in our way of life which is lived towards God. In this way we must be connected with and supportive of the Wampanoag and the indigenous peoples of this land. In solidarity with the Mashpee Wampanoag people, we call on the United States Department of the Interior and the political leaders of this land to honor and respect the reservation lands of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe.

Responding to the Mashpee Wampanoag call for support and advocating with the tribe, we ask you to consider taking any or all of the actions listed below.

Signed by the Episcopal Bishops of New England:

The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Carol J. Gallagher, Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, Connecticut

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, Connecticut

The Rt. Rev. W. Nicholas Knisely, Rhode Island

The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher, Western Massachusetts

The Rt. Rev. Shannon MacVean-Brown, Vermont

The Rt. Rev. Thomas J. Brown, Maine

The Rt. Rev. A. Robert Hirschfeld, New Hampshire

On May 15, 2019, the Mashpee Wampanoag Reservation Reaffirmation Act HR312 was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives. The U.S. Senate is yet to take up the HR312 legislation.

CALL YOUR SENATORS

ASK: Please protect the Mashpee Reservation by passing HR312

WRITE TO SENATE INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN HOEVEN AND RANKING MEMBER UDALL

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman Senate Indian Affairs Committee
338 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member Senate Indian Affairs Committee
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

CONTACT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO EXPRESS YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE MASHPEE WAMPANOAG TRIBE. Find contact information [here](#)

SIGN THE PETITION at [here](#)

To learn more about the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe and what is at stake, you can watch this video: <https://vimeo.com/293866929>

To learn more about the Episcopal Church and the Doctrine of Discovery, you can see the resources on this page: <https://episcopalchurch.org/library/topics/doctrine-discovery>