

## **Symbols count!**

### **The movement to change the Massachusetts State Seal and flag grows**

These days there are many wrongs waiting to be righted, many victims of economic and racial injustice, and more. Action needs to be taken on all fronts: sometimes this takes a symbolic form with great meaning.

With that in mind, Traprock supported and joined a recent delegation from Western Mass, taking a bus to Boston to rally and testify at the State House in favor of a package of legislation introduced and supported by the first nations of our state.

The November 19, 2019, hearing at the State House before the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight, focused specifically on the House and Senate bills H. 2776 and S.1877, to establish a special committee to recommend a new or redesigned seal for the state flag and other uses, which are many.

In this Thanksgiving season, and on the eve of 2020, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the first British colonists in Massachusetts, it is appropriate to take a new look at the symbol of our state.

The original from 1629 depicted a Native American clothed only in a loincloth of leaves, saying "Come over and help us." This image was updated to a design adopted by the legislature in 1898 that supposedly shows the "ideal Native American." The original saying was replaced by a Latin motto beginning: "By the sword we seek peace..."

Over the image of this Native American holding an arrow upside down is a sword, modeled on the broadsword Myles Standish. According to the organizers of the campaign to [ChangeTheMassFlag.com](http://ChangeTheMassFlag.com), Standish, military commander of the Plymouth colony, was known for killing Native Americans.

Once the image and history of the symbol is understood, the need to rethink it becomes clearer.

From Traprock's written testimony to the joint committee: "For 35 years Rep. Byron Rushing introduced legislation to create a commission to consider changing the symbol adopted in 1898. Now, as the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the colonial landing in our state approaches, it is time to move towards replacing the racist and implicitly violent symbol with one reflecting peace, justice liberty and equality for all."

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The testimony continues: "We have seen and support a movement in the southern states especially to dismantle visual symbols of white supremacy. The campaign to change the symbol on our flag, long opposed by the indigenous peoples it is supposed to represent, is long overdue. This process is opening eyes to the grave and violent mistakes of our past history.

"In our part of the state alone, 21 of 24 towns in Franklin and Hampshire counties support this legislation and its intent, following the leadership on this of indigenous communities in our state and beyond.

We therefore request that the bills S.1877/H.2776 “[Resolve providing for the creation of a special commission relative to the seal and motto of the Commonwealth.](#)” be reported out of committee with a favorable vote.”

The Western Mass. delegation to the hearing was met and supported by Senator Jo Comerford, a cosponsor of the bill in the Senate, along with other W. MA members of the state senate Paul W. Mark and Adam Hinds. Cosponsors in the House include presenter Lindsay Sabadosa, Mindy Domb, Natalie M. Blais and Susannah M. Whipps. We thank all of the local legislators for their efforts.

The Mass. Indigenous Legislative Agenda 2019-2020 <http://maindigenousagenda.org> supports five pieces of legislation. Besides the effort to [Change the Flag and Seal](#), other bills include: [Honor Indigenous Peoples Day](#), replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day to celebrate Indigenous resilience and survival; [Protect Native American Heritage](#), protecting objects of cultural patrimony; [Remove Racist Mascots](#), end the use of Native American mascots in Massachusetts public schools; and [Educate Native Youth](#), to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students.

*For more information see: [maindigenousagenda.org](http://maindigenousagenda.org) and [ChangeTheMassFlag.com](http://ChangeTheMassFlag.com)*