

2024 -- H 8321

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

HOUSE RESOLUTION

IN SUPPORT OF ACKNOWLEDGING BLOCK ISLAND'S MANISSEAN TRIBAL NATIVES

Introduced By: Representatives Diaz, Spears, Shekarchi, Blazejewski, Chippendale,
Edwards, Kennedy, Azzinaro, Slater, and J. Brien

Date Introduced: May 30, 2024

Referred To: House read and passed

1 WHEREAS, The State of Rhode Island has been home to Native Tribes for centuries; and

2 WHEREAS, The first founders to establish a community on Block Island were
3 Manissean tribal Natives, who inhabited the island called "Manisses" for centuries; and

4 WHEREAS, In 1661, Native tribe members that remained on the island numbered
5 between 1,200 and 1,500, but by 1774 that number had been reduced to 51; and

6 WHEREAS, In 1985, an archaeological excavation located a year-round Manissean
7 village site on the island with carbon dated objects establishing its time frame to be 500 B.C.; and

8 WHEREAS, Artifacts found in this area suggested that this highly skilled maritime
9 culture went deep-sea fishing by navigating their dugout canoes through a transient breach way
10 between Great Salt Pond and the ocean. Remains of many sturgeon, a deep-water fish, were
11 found during the excavation along the shore of the pond; and

12 WHEREAS, Additional archaeological sites on the island indicate that the indigenous
13 tribes lived primarily by hunting deer, catching fish and shellfish, growing corn, beans and squash
14 and making trades with Wampum; and

15 WHEREAS, In 1672, Block Island received its Town Charter from the Rhode Island
16 General Assembly, and was incorporated by the Colony of Rhode Island as "New Shoreham,
17 otherwise known as Block Island"; and

18 WHEREAS, The tiny tribal native community has persevered despite wars, invasion,
19 servitude and taxation; and

20 WHEREAS, Through the ensuing centuries, the Manissean Tribe Natives remained a

1 challenged and independent community while still fully participating in the local economy; and

2 WHEREAS, The Manissean natives remain unabashedly proud of their island and their
3 heritage. They strive to strike a balance among preservation of land, cultural awareness and tribal
4 development, and affordable living and economic opportunities in today's economy; and

5 WHEREAS, The Manissean Tribe celebrates the importance and rich heritage of all the
6 ancestors who have come before them to establish native village communities on Block Island;
7 now, therefore be it

8 RESOLVED, That this House of Representatives of the State of Rhode Island hereby
9 supports acknowledging Block Island's Manissean Tribal Natives; and be it further

10 RESOLVED, That this House hereby honors the Manissean Native Ancestors and
11 Descendants. We furthermore commemorate and encourage the preservation of the local
12 indigenous culture and their historical sites; and be it further

13 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to
14 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Maryann Govern Mathews, President of the
15 Manissean Tribe of Block Island, for the descendants of the island's original native families.

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