



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #SD-15-006

TITLE: In Support of Allowing Native Students to Wear Eagle Feathers at High School Graduation

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WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, every year, American Indian and Alaska Native high school students from across the country are given eagle feathers to be worn at graduation ceremonies as a form of practice and expression of spiritual and religious beliefs; and

WHEREAS, the feathers are also given for the students' leadership and academic achievement; as a sign of maturity; to signify the achievement of this important educational journey; to honor the graduate and his or her family, community, and tribal nation; and for many other reasons; and

WHEREAS, these American Indian and Alaska Native high school students seek to express and practice their religious and spiritual beliefs and celebrate their personal academic achievement, leadership, and transition into adulthood, among other things, by wearing an eagle feather at their graduation ceremony; and

WHEREAS, graduation from high school is an especially significant occasion for Native students and families, considering that the American Indian and Alaska Native high school graduation rate is 67 percent, the lowest of any racial or ethnic demographic across all schools; and

WHEREAS, from time immemorial, many tribal nations have viewed eagles and eagle feathers as sacred elements of their religious and cultural traditions; and

WHEREAS, federal law and policy has long recognized the religious significance of eagles, eagle feathers, and eagle parts to Native peoples; and

WHEREAS, for example, Congress exempted American Indians and Alaska Natives from the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1962, which prohibited the take, transport, and possession of bald and golden eagles, and thus allowed tribal members to continue to include eagle parts in their religious ceremonies; and

WHEREAS, according to many Native religious and spiritual traditions, eagle feathers are given only in times of great honor and often to mark significant personal achievement; and

WHEREAS, for many Native students, receiving an eagle feather in recognition of high school graduation is as significant as earning the diploma; and

WHEREAS, while most public high schools permit Native students to wear eagle feathers at graduation, recognizing that commencement ceremonies are an appropriate setting for Native graduates to wear an eagle feather with dignity, some schools do not allow it; and

WHEREAS, during the past academic year a number of media outlets across the country covered stories of Native American students not being allowed to wear their eagle feathers during their high school graduations in certain school districts located in Oklahoma, Washington, and California.

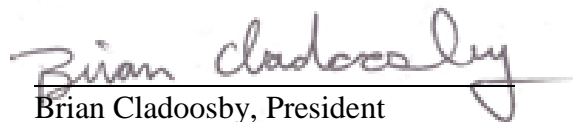
NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports the right of American Indian and Alaska Native high school students to practice and express their traditional religious and spiritual beliefs and honor their academic and other achievements by wearing an eagle feather at their commencement ceremonies; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI urges all schools to respect traditional tribal religious and spiritual beliefs by allowing Native students to wear an eagle feather at graduation; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2015 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Town and Country Resort, San Diego, CA, October 18-23, 2015, with a quorum present.


Brian Cladoosby, President

ATTEST:


Aaron A. Payment