

To: House Federal and State Affairs Committee, Representative John Barker, Chairman
From: Maura Garcia (non-enrolled Cherokee/Mattamuskeet), resident of Lawrence, KS

Date: February 1, 2018

Re: HB 2498- Native American Regalia

Good morning Chairman Barker and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to present written testimony in support of HB-2498. I am currently the youth activity coordinator for culture night at the Kansas City Indian Center. We serve Native families within an 80 mile radius of Kansas City, including people in Johnson, Douglas, Wyandotte, Shawnee, Jefferson and Leavenworth counties.

On January 10th, I wrote a letter to Truman High School in Independence, MO on behalf of one of our youth who was told she would not be able to walk at graduation if she had an eagle feather on her cap. The following is an excerpt from this letter:

"I am aware that Truman is a diverse school that seems to be dedicated to the success of their students. Among most Native American tribal nations, we hold the eagle feather to be sacred. Prohibiting such an important cultural and spiritual expression at one of the pivotal moments in a young person's life seems out of keeping with the supportive environment Truman wishes to promote.

It is my belief that the staff is perhaps unaware of the significance of the eagle feather, the 1978 Indian Religious Freedom Act and the precedence throughout high schools in the United States. Please see the attached brochure entitled "Wearing Eagle Feathers at Graduation" for reference. It was prepared by the Native American Rights Fund and the Tribal Education Departments National Assembly and should answer most of your questions.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and the pamphlet. I deeply appreciate the work you do for the youth and look forward to seeing the issue of the feathers amicably resolved."

Unfortunately the principal of Truman still refused to allow our student to wear an eagle feather. Since the 10th, I have written to the superintendent and we now have a meeting on the 21st of February. The student, her family and I have already spent three weeks sending messages, rallying support, discussing options, drafting letters and rearranging schedules. I am lucky to have the time and experience to help, but many other hard-working Native people do not.

For many years throughout the United States, any display of Native American culture was illegal. We have fought so hard for our physical, cultural and spiritual existence. I am writing in support of HB-2498 to ensure that Native students and families in Kansas do not have to fight for something that should be so simple. We need our time and energy for other issues.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maura Garcia', with a horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Maura Garcia, MFA

Lawrence, Kansas