



CITY OF SHAWNEE
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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Date: March 14, 2022

To: Chairman Barker and House Committee on Federal and State Affairs

From: Mayor Michelle Distler

Re: Written Testimony in Support of SB 405

Chairman Olson and Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee Members,

I write today in support of SB 405, which conveys ownership of the Shawnee Indian Cemetery, located at 59th Terrace and Nieman Road in Shawnee, KS, from the State Historical Society to the Shawnee Tribe.

In addition to our namesake, our city's history is inexorably linked to that of the Shawnee Tribe. As Mayor, I am dedicated to nurturing that relationship and educating our citizenry of our area's first peoples.

Last year, City staff and I met with Shawnee Chief Ben Barnes and tribal representatives to begin discussions on how we can honor and promote these ties. Actions under consideration include:

- A community discussion series programming with tribal members
- Official recognition of our heritage relationship
- Coordination of public art in Gum Springs Park
- Returning the Shawnee Indian Cemetery to Shawnee Tribe ownership

The last bullet for consideration is the topic of SB 405. Although the property is small, approximately one-half acre, the site is of great historical and cultural significance to the tribe. The burial ground was in use long before the founding of Shawnee, as it is known today. The first known burial was of a 6-year-old daughter of Joseph and Catherine Parks in 1837. The cemetery includes burial sites of Shawnee tribal leaders, including Chief Joseph Parks and Charles Silverheels, along with the second wife and children of Chief Charles Bluejacket.

Based on this testimony, the City of Shawnee requests you pass out SB 405.

Mayor Michelle Distler City of Shawnee, KS

Sister City to:

Pittem, West Flanders, Belgium Erfurt, Germany Listowel, County Kerry, Ireland