

NCAI Youth Commission
Embassy of Tribal Nations
1516 P Street NW
Washington, DC 20005

June 20, 2023

Dear Members of the Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names,

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Youth Commission is pleased to write to the ACRP to express our sincere gratitude for the committee's work to eliminate racist and derogatory place names around the country. This work is essential for establishing healthy and empowering environments for the youth and future generations. We also want to thank you for allowing the Native youth to weigh in on the conversation and submit our concerns and hopes for the committee. The NCAI Youth Commission aligns with the committee's mission to enact change and provide solutions for future generations. The youth commission is composed of five young leaders from across Indian Country. We work to support and advocate for the issues and demands of Native youth everywhere. A central part of our mission is to develop a united front for Native youth voices and ensure that future generations are being considered and consulted.

We confidently object to applying, validating, and endorsing any derogatory place names. This abstention extends from geographic, federal, and commemorative place names. We include commemorative names because our youth commission does not believe that a lengthy and complex process should prevent the progress of renaming and healing the land. Derogatory place names, even in memorials, are accessories to the damage and harm to Native youth named in this letter. Derogatory place names are disempowering. They have served as a colonial tool: severing Indigenous relationships to the land by renaming and stripping the land of Indigenous representation. Derogatory place names have alienated Indigenous people from their homes and land-based relatives. Naming public lands, especially after derogatory and racist figures, events, and ideas, created division within the land that implies power, dominance, and capital interest. Now generations of youth are growing up identifying the land as something other than their relatives. Our concern is with the profound impact on Native Youth and representation. The Youth Commission is dedicated to uplifting the image, voice, and power of native youth, and harmful place names jeopardize that. We agree with Mike Catches Enemy's comments concerning increasing rates of Native youth suicide and how essential it is to have positive representation to mitigate that. It is critical that Native youth see themselves reflected in the world positively. Meaningful representation can help build strong identities and reaffirm our culture and ways of life.

We know that names are intentional and powerful. Members of our youth commission hold traditional names that provide guidance and great pride. As was echoed throughout the meeting,

naming can be an empowering tool that helps us work towards rectifying the harm of colonialism and native land theft. In reversing this harm, our youth commission has objectives to be considered. There is a need for more concrete tribal representation on state naming boards. Representation continues after signage and plaques. In areas where the historical displacement of tribes occurred, we demand an effort to establish a meaningful commitment and relationship with these displaced and surrounding tribes, consider their requests, and offer thoughtful consultation. Consultation should extend beyond an honorary board member and consider the community and its needs. The committee must also prioritize the return to Indigenous names when considering replacement name recommendations. The land has ancestral ties to language, and this return would marry the land and its people back to its fundamental relationship. Having tribal representation and consultation would help assist those efforts.

The NCAI Youth Commission is dedicated to furthering this mission. Don't hesitate to contact our commission to let us know how else we can help provide comments or resources for place-name research and project advancement. Thank you for your consistent work and advocacy to repair this relationship with the land and deliver names of justice and healing.

Nya:weh,

Yanenowi Logan
NCAI Youth Commission Co-President
Seneca Nation of Indians