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11/24/23

Andrea DeKoter, PhD
Committee Manager
Reconciliation in Place Names Committee
Office of Policy, National Park Service

Subject: Public Comment on the Necessity of Renaming Derogatory and Racist Place Names

Dear Federal Advisory Committee,

We are writing on behalf of the Junior North American Indians Women's Association. Junior North American Indians Women's Association is a transformative platform for the holistic development of young Indigenous women, focusing on leadership skills and cultural knowledge sharing. By nurturing a commitment to community service, the program empowers these emerging leaders to make enduring contributions to their communities, fostering positive change.

We want to express our strong support for the crucial initiative to rename derogatory and racist place names, and we commend the efforts of the Reconciliation on Place Names Committees for their dedication to fostering a more inclusive and respectful environment for all communities.

The power of place names lies not only in their geographic significance but also in their cultural and historical implications. By acknowledging and rectifying derogatory and racist place names, we take a significant step towards creating a more equitable and just society. We appreciate the dedication of the committees involved in this process and their commitment to addressing the harm caused by these names.

In order to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive renaming process, we would like to recommend the following actions:

1. Engage with Local Indigenous Nations:

Encourage active involvement and leadership from local Indigenous Nations in the renaming process. Respectful collaboration with Indigenous communities ensures that their perspectives are central to the decision-making process.

2. Involve Those Forcefully Removed from Ancestral Homelands:

Recognize the importance of engaging with individuals and communities who were forcefully removed from their Ancestral homelands. Their unique insights and experiences contribute to a more holistic understanding of the impact of place names.

3. Actively Engage the Community:

Facilitate meaningful engagement with local businesses, youth, and the broader community. Their input is invaluable in shaping a collective identity that reflects the values and aspirations of the entire community.

4. Grant Opportunities:

Advocate for grants to be made available to support local renaming efforts. Financial resources are essential to ensure that the renaming process is thorough, respectful, and well-researched.

5. Prioritize Local Recommendations:

Recommend prioritizing renaming suggestions from the local community and those directly harmed by the current names. This approach ensures that the renaming process is driven by the voices most affected by the derogatory or racist nature of the existing names.

6. Integrate into K-12 Curriculum:

Suggest the integration of the history of place names and the renaming process into the K-12 curriculum. Education is a powerful tool for fostering awareness and understanding, especially among the youth.

7. Positive Representation and Awareness:

Emphasize the importance of positive representation in media and public education curriculum. Addressing the issues faced by Indian Country and Native

youth, such as invisibility and cultural misrepresentation, can contribute to a more positive and inclusive social environment. Acknowledge the connection between positive representation, honest history in education, and the mental well-being of Native youth. By providing accurate information and fostering a sense of cultural pride, we can contribute to reducing the alarming rates of Native American teen suicide.

In conclusion, We believe that the renaming of derogatory and racist place names is an essential step towards building a more inclusive and respectful society. We trust that the Reconciliation on Place Names Committees will consider these recommendations to ensure a thorough and collaborative process that reflects the diverse perspectives of the communities involved.

Thank you for your commitment to this important cause.

Sincerely,

Jasmine Smith
Chairwomen
Junior NAIWA