

**To: Senate Federal and State Affairs committee**

**From: Maura Garcia (non-enrolled Cherokee/Mattamuskeet), resident of Lawrence, KS**

**Date: March 1, 2018**

**Re: HB 2498- Native American Regalia**

Good morning 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 (KCIC). 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, 2018 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.*

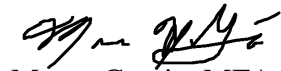
*Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and the pamphlet. I deeply appreciate the work you do for the youth and look forward to seeing the issue of the feathers amicably resolved.”*

Unfortunately the principal of Truman still refused to allow our student to wear an eagle feather. On January 17th, I wrote to the superintendent who responded with a request for a meeting. After several emails and scheduling changes, we met on February 21. Also in attendance were 2 Native American high school seniors, the director of KCIC, a KCIC social worker and a KCIC board member. The superintendent informed me that he would “get back with me”, but was unable to give a timeline. To date, I have not received any further correspondence from either the principal or the superintendent.

Last week, I contacted the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) who will be sending a letter to the superintendent in support of Native students being permitted to wear an eagle feather at graduation. I have also filed a complaint with the ACLU and they are in the midst of talking with the student. Additionally, the KCIC board has drafted a letter of support and their staff members have spent time collecting allies and resources. The student, her family, her advocates and I have already spent two months 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 stylized flourish at the end.

Maura Garcia, MFA

Lawrence, Kansas