

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STEPHANIE BYERS
86TH DISTRICT

Chairman Barker and committee,

I thank you for the opportunity to give testimony today in favor of SB 405. Each of the First American Nations have their own customs and practices. I am a member of the Chickasaw Nation where we have the practice of “Keepers of The Flame”, our storytellers. Sacred Fires have been a part of our tribal culture. These fires belong to sacred sites where my Nation has existed: in places in Kentucky, Alabama, Tennessee and especially Mississippi. When the Chickasaw Nation was removed from our traditional homelands and placed in what is now Oklahoma, the sacred fire and our Keepers of the Flame went as well. When the government of the United States decided the Chickasaws were no longer a separate nation, our sacred fires were moved to secret places, where they still exist today. Before removal, The Keepers of the Flame tell us that when one of us passed, they were placed in their house and then the house set afire – joining them to the sacred flame. After colonization, the practice changed to be more like a Christian burial with one exception – small, representative houses, were built on top of the grave. These sacred burials are scattered now amongst the lands of Mississippi and the hills of Oklahoma. We believe that our ancestors are ever present about us. I know that Acoyetly Ishmanaubby and Minerva Maytubby were forced from their home in Mississippi and started a new life in Oklahoma, that they brought the practices of our Turtle Clan with them. Where they lay in rest now has been lost to history and record. If I knew where the land that they belonged to is located, I would make every effort to honor them by taking care of the land that has been taking care of them for over a century and a half. Their granddaughter is my great grandmother, Nancy Brown Byers. I never knew Nancy, but I know that she, her parents and her grandparents, danced prayers around the sacred fire – for my grandfather, my father, me, and for my sons, and my grandchildren. This is our way. Relationships are not just linear. There may be a beginning and an ending, but just as the land we belong to was here before us and will go on after us, so are the dances of our spirits in the smoke of the sacred fires.

Although I am not a member of the Shawnee Tribe, I stand with them and believe they should be the caretakers of the sacred piece of land where their ancestors lay in rest and continue to belong to.

Representative Stephanie Byers

She/Her

Kansas House of Representatives, 86th District

Chickashsha Saya!