



# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

## The National Congress of American Indians Resolution # MOH-17-032

### **TITLE: Support for American Indians/Alaska Native Student Religious Expression at Commencement Ceremonies and Events**

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**WHEREAS**, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

**WHEREAS**, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

**WHEREAS**, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act is a U. S. federal law and a joint resolution of Congress that was passed in 1978 to protect and preserve the traditional religious rights and cultural practices of American Indians, Eskimos, Aleuts and Native Hawaiians; and

**WHEREAS**, federal law, long standing policy and inherent sovereignty have long recognized the religious and cultural significance of ceremonial items to Native peoples; and

**WHEREAS**, Congress exempted American Indians and Alaska Natives from the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1962, which prohibited the take, transport, and possession of bald and golden eagles, and thus allowed tribal members to continue to include eagle parts in their religious ceremonies; and

**WHEREAS**, American Indian and Alaska Native students seek to express and practice their religious and spiritual beliefs and celebrate their personal academic achievement, leadership, and transition into adulthood, among other things, by wearing items of religious significance including but not limited to, eagle feathers, cedar hats, bead work, headdresses, stoles and other traditional regalia at their commencement ceremony; and

**WHEREAS**, graduation is an especially significant occasion for Native students and families, considering that the American Indian and Alaska Native high school graduation rate is 67 percent, the lowest of any racial or ethnic demographic across all schools in the U.S.; and

**WHEREAS**, according to many Native religious and spiritual traditions, eagle feathers, head dresses and other sacred items are worn only in times of great honor and often to mark significant personal achievement; and

**WHEREAS**, during the past academic year a number of media outlets across the country covered stories of Native American students not being allowed to wear their eagle feathers or other items of cultural and spiritual significance during their commencement celebrations in certain school districts which has caused unnecessary distress on students and families.

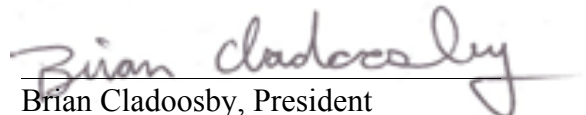
**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) supports the right of American Indian and Alaska Native students to practice and express their traditional religious and spiritual beliefs and honor their academic and other achievements at commencement ceremonies and events; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that NCAI urges all schools to respect traditional tribal religious and spiritual beliefs by allowing Native students to practice their religious freedom; and

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

#### **CERTIFICATION**

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2017 Midyear Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Mohegan Sun Convention Center, June 12 to June 15, 2017, with a quorum present.

  
Brian Cladoosby, President

**ATTEST:**

  
Aaron Payment, Recording Secretary