

Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins,
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Honorable Jessica Feldmark,
Vice Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
Distinguished Members

Reference: House Bill 627 – “Commission on History, Culture, and Civics in Education - Establishment”

Greetings, (Wingapo)

I am writing on behalf of the Pocomoke Indian Nation, Inc., a descendant tribal community indigenous to and located on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. Our mission is to protect and preserve the historic and cultural resources of the Pocomoke Tribal Homelands within the State of Maryland. My comments represent my position as a Council member of the Pocomoke Indian Nation.

Our community has presented at museums, schools, historic societies, archeological societies, and universities throughout the region and state. We have worked on projects in collaboration with numerous state agencies and were awarded the Maryland State Arts Council Heritage Award for Place in 2024. In the 2024-2025 school year we created and provided cultural resources, supported by primary documentation from the Maryland State Archives to K-12 schools on the Lower Eastern Shore. This pop-up museum and related curriculum was developed in accordance with current state social study standards and taught to over 4500 students in its inaugural year of 2024-2025. This outreach is on target to well exceed that goal in the 2025-2026 school year.

Although House Bill 627 appears focused on inclusion, some language in the section below creates confusion and the potential for exclusion and/or discrimination as it does not accurately reflect or include all of Maryland’s Indigenous American Tribes and descendant communities. Tribal names currently listed in the bill include groups that are not indigenous to Maryland and omits groups that are both historically indigenous to Maryland and active in outreach to the public. Additionally, the word “TRIBE” can have specific legal definitions in certain matters. Therefore, the phrase “MARYLAND’S INDIGENOUS DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES” is more inclusive of our population in Maryland that have historic ties to Native American history within the geographic boundaries of the State.

Our concerns are specifically in the areas cited below:

7-137

Page 2

(C)(1)(I)

“TWO MEMBERS REPRESENTING MARYLAND’S INDIGENOUS AMERICAN TRIBES, WHICH INCLUDE THE LENAPE, NANTICOKE, PISCATAWAY, CONOY, POWHATAN, ACCOHANNOCK, SHAWNEE, SUSQUEHANNOCK, TUTELO, AND SAPONI TRIBES, NOMINATED BY THE MARYLAND COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS;”

Therefore, it is recommended the wording under 7-137, Page 2, (C)(1)(I) be amended as follows:

“TWO MEMBERS REPRESENTING MARYLAND’S INDIGENOUS ~~AMERICAN TRIBES~~ **DESCENDANT COMMUNITIES**, WHICH INCLUDE ~~THE LENAPE, NANTICOKE, PISCATAWAY, CONOY, POWHATAN, ACCOHANNOCK, SHAWNEE, SUSQUEHANNOCK, TUTELO, AND SAPONI TRIBES,~~ NOMINATED BY THE MARYLAND COMMISSION ON INDIAN AFFAIRS;”

Thank you (Wanishi) for your attention and consideration to this language clarification as it serves to create a more inclusive benefit to the Indigenous People, heritage, and culture in the State of Maryland.

Respectfully submitted,

Norris C. Howard, Jr.

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Council Member

Pocomoke Indian Nation, Inc.

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