



**Education Committee
PUBLIC HEARING
Friday, March 6, 2020**

**Testimony of Chief Mutáwi Mutáhash (Many Hearts) Marilyn “Lynn” Malerba
Chief of the Mohegan Tribe**

In Support of

S.B. No. 314 AN ACT CONCERNING THE INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM.

Chairman McCrory and Sanchez and Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty and members of the committee.

My name is Chief Mutáwi Mutáhash (Many Hearts) Marilyn “Lynn” Malerba and I am Chief of the Mohegan Tribe, and the first female Chief in the Tribe's modern history. Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the hearing today, but I wanted to take the opportunity to submit testimony in support of including Native American studies in the social studies curriculum.

As you are well aware, the narrative about our American Indians and Alaska Natives, the first peoples of this land varies widely from positive to negative, employing many stereotypes and beliefs that may or may not be grounded in fact. Imagine being a very shy child at the Mohegan elementary school and being taught that Columbus discovered America. While you know from what you have been taught at home that this is not entirely correct, you are uncomfortable challenging the authority of your teacher and sharing your truth. Later on in middle school and high school “Manifest Destiny” was taught from the perspective of the United States, not the millions of indigenous people who were so adversely affected. I believe that this act will do much to correct similar situations in the future and educate our children on what really happened during the formulation of the United States. Additionally, I think the story of resilience, and nation rebuilding is important for our students to understand not just the historic context in which we lived, but our continued survival as tribal nations. Too often, Native American people and their tribes are viewed as relics, belonging to the past but in fact we are governments. Prior to United States was formed we had diplomatic relationships with the crowns of Europe. Currently we engage with the United States as sovereign governments.

Our Tribe is proud to have the Tantaquidgeon Museum founded by John Tantaquidgeon and his children Gladys and Harold in 1931. In fact, the museum was created to teach not only our Mohegan families about their culture and thus ensure its survival, but also to ensure that our neighbors understood who we are. There is a quote attributed to Gladys Tantaquidgeon that reflects that thought: “You can’t hate someone you know a lot about.” The Tantaquidgeon Museum in Uncasville is the oldest Native American owned and operated Indian museum in America. Generations of Mohegan and non-Mohegan children have visited our museum and enjoyed the knowledge they have gained.

Our tribe continues our commitment to preserving and teaching native history through our Mohegan Tribe Challenge Grant Program. This instructional program funded solely by the Mohegan Tribe to expand and advance the Native American curriculum in Connecticut schools while specifically concentrating on Native American sovereignty and the history, tradition, government and culture of Connecticut's tribes.

This program funds educational materials for the classroom as well as a one-day instructional program taught by a Mohegan Tribe representative and a visit for the students to the Mohegan Museum for a field trip, bus expenses included. All teachers providing instructions to students in grades 4- 12 at Connecticut schools are eligible to apply. The selection team reviews and selects proposals based on their creative approach in illustrating how Connecticut Native American society, since contact with the first settlers, shares certain similarities with Non-Indian society. Proposals from Grades 4-8 include at least three of the themes: family life, dwellings, healing & medicine, education, technology, rituals, ceremonies & celebrations.

Proposals from Grades 9-12 include at least three of the following themes: government, economy, language, healing& medicine, technology, society, rituals, ceremonies & celebrations.

In addition to our Mohegan Challenge Grant program we have taken the additional step of hosting the Connecticut Teacher of the Year program for nearly ten years. The relationship between the Mohegan Tribe and the educators of Connecticut continues a long Mohegan tradition of co-operation and outreach. As the Connecticut Teacher of the Year program celebrates excellence in teaching, our own challenge grant program recognizes teachers who take a creative, interesting and innovative approach to the Native American curriculum.

The Mohegan Tribe honors the Teacher of the Year, and 12 semi-finalists at a reception at Mohegan Sun attended by the Education Commissioner, the Mohegan Tribal Council and other state and local officials. The event, attended by teachers and their families and local superintendents, also include a two-day workshop for educators on integrating Native American themes into curriculum.

The Teacher of the Year and nominees participate in a workshop with members of the Mohegan Tribe who developed the Native American curriculum in conjunction with the State Department of Education. Following the workshop, the teachers and their guests enjoyed lunch and a tour that included the Mohegan Church and Museum as well as other historical sites and cultural destinations in the area.

While these efforts are important and instrumental in sharing our story, they fall well short of educating the whole of our Connecticut citizenry. It is vital that we teach the history of the first peoples of Connecticut from the perspective of the first peoples of Connecticut. It is even more vital that we bring understanding to the continued survival and our government to government with Connecticut and its native people to dispel inaccuracies and truly speak the truth. It is only through a deep understanding of one another, that we live in harmony with one another.

The proposal before you today add to the commitment to preserve the important history of the indigenous population of Connecticut and we support its passage.