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Testimony submitted by:

Chief Richard Velky - Schaghticoke Tribal Nation

Education Committee Public Hearing - Wednesday, March 17, 2021

In **SUPPORT** of HB 6619: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
KINDERGARTEN TO EIGHT GRADE MODEL CURRICULUM

Chairman McCrory, Chairman Sanchez, and distinguished members of the Education Committee, I am here to testify in SUPPORT of House Bill 6619, An Act Concerning the Development of a Kindergarten to Eight Grade Model Curriculum.

For the transcript, my name is Richard Velky, Chief of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation of Kent Connecticut. The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation has been recognized first by the Colony of Connecticut in 1736 and post-Revolutionary War by the State and General Assembly, continuous to this day. Our reservation was granted in 1752 but our historical ties to western Connecticut and Eastern New York reach well back into the 1600s.

First, I would like to acknowledge Senator Cathy Osten for her support and work on bringing this important issue to Connecticut's first citizen. Beginning in 2019 and in legislation introduced this session, Senate Bill 249, An Act Concerning the Inclusion of Native American Studies in Social Studies Curriculum, I understand, has been incorporated within HB 6619. Senator Osten has already testified most eloquently speaking on the importance of this legislation and, if you will, setting the record straight.

I wanted to share from my own upbringing. I, along with my six siblings, grew up in Bridgeport. My mother Catherine (Princess Matoaka) was a Schaghticoke. We would have been raised in Kent; however, the State, first through Parks and Forests Commission, Welfare commission, and Department of Environmental Protection, established regulations prohibiting Tribal Members from residing on our lands. The irony is that until 1972, Connecticut did not recognize any members of the five indigenous tribes as citizens. Technically, unless we rejected our heritage, we had no rights granted to others, in this, the Constitution State.

Growing up, as children do, at least in the 1950s, my friends and I would play cowboys and Indians. At first, I did not want to be an Indian. Nobody did! Television portrayed Indians as savages and in those shows or movies, the Indians never won. Who wanted to be a loser? It was after my mother explained our heritage and history that I began to take a different stance and proud to be an Indian.

After an honorable discharge from the US Navy in 1971, I became active within our Tribe, first as chairman of the housing committee, then as vice chair, being elected Chief in 1987. Under provisions of our Constitution, I retain that position for life, provided I do not exceed the authority therein granted to me.

When we began the arduous effort to document our history, we found our ancient Burial ground on the banks of the Housatonic; it was flooded over in the early 1900s when the New Milford Hydro Power Company constructed a dam and the Bull's Bridge power generation station. Although some effort was undertaken to locate graves and reintern remains of my ancestors, a thorough job was not performed. In 2001, with the help of ground penetrating radar, a number of grave sites were identified. Our request to Senator Osten was to either help us move these remains, or have the State DEEP, our overseers under provisions of state statutes, construct a retaining wall to prevent the Housatonic from flooding this sacred land.

You hear a lot about the two Federally Recognized Tribes, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and the Mohegan Tribe. Senator Osten was kind enough to point out the Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation and my tribes, the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, were also federally recognized; however, Connecticut Politicians, fearful of what this recognition might bring, lobbied with success to have recognition repealed. Notice of this came to us, as Senator Osten pointed out, on Columbus Day in 2005. We continue to seek Federal Recognition, but the path is much tougher than the 1,400-foot vertical climb that is the 400-acre remnant of our historic reservation in Kent on Schaghticoke Mountain.

Members of the Education Committee and all Representatives and Senators in the General Assembly: Diversity is now the catch word as so many people and cultures are demanding and being recognized. Ask yourselves, why is it that the truth about our first citizens and Native peoples no less important?

I applaud your work and hope you will support this important bill. And please reach out to me should you have questions about the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation.

Thank you.

Chief Richard Velky

Schaghticoke Tribal Nation