



July 22, 2019

Re: Support for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act of 2019

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM), we write to express our strong support for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act of 2019. ATALM is a native-led non-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving and advancing the language, history, culture, and lifeways of indigenous peoples. In 2018 it provided training to over 4,000 tribal cultural practitioners from 352 Native Nations. Its annual conferences serve as a platform for collaboration among Native and non-Native cultural institutions as well as an outlet for federal agencies to host listening sessions. With 1,200 members and a social media following that reaches millions each year, ATALM provides an effective voice for issues of importance to Native peoples.

ATALM's chairman of the board is Walter Echo-Hawk, who was instrumental in securing the passage of two federal laws that respect Native and religious freedoms, as well as the repatriation of ancestral remains and items of patrimony. Under Mr. Echo-Hawk's leadership, ATALM is committed to repatriation issues, both nationally and internationally.

Despite protections in current law, the illicit trade in tribes' tangible cultural heritage continues to pose a grave threat to our cultural survival. Our sacred and cultural items are illegally taken from our people, threatening the maintenance of our cultures and traditions and depriving us of the cultural legacy we seek to leave our future generations. Meanwhile, a lucrative black market in our cultural heritage thrives, and without explicit export restrictions many of our sacred and cultural items end up abroad. Once abroad, we have had very little success in efforts to bring them home.

The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums supports the STOP Act's goal of making it more difficult to export and easier for tribes to regain their cultural heritage from abroad. To that end, the STOP Act creates an explicit prohibition on exporting cultural heritage obtained in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), or the Antiquities Act, and it puts in place an export certification system to accompany the prohibition. Together, these measures make it possible for tribes to access other countries' domestic laws and law enforcement mechanisms to regain their cultural heritage, as certain countries, such as France, restrict import of cultural heritage illegally exported from a country that provides export certificates. They also make it possible for, and the STOP Act confirms the authority of, the President to enter into agreements under a 1970 international treaty in order to request from other countries return of tribes' cultural heritage.

We also support the STOP Act's increased penalties for violations of NAGPRA, and we support its provisions that facilitate more coordination within the federal government and between the federal government and tribes aimed at protecting tribes' cultural heritage and facilitating its return.

The STOP Act does not extend federal protections to cultural heritage that is not already protected, and thus it does not criminalize any currently legal domestic activity. Instead, it merely increases the deterrent effect of current law by imposing heightened penalties and provides that traffickers may not export their contraband.

We believe the STOP Act will help end illegal trafficking in tribes' cultural heritage and bring home our sacred and cultural items that have been separated from our communities for far too long.

Thank you for your leadership in supporting and advancing this important measure. Please let us know if there is anything we may do to further your efforts.

Sincerely,

Walter Echo-Hawk

Walter Echo-Hawk
Chairman of the Board

Susan Feller

Susan Feller
President & CEO

Officers

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Jim Enote, CEO, Colorado Plateau Foundation

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Kevin Gover, Director, National Museum of the American Indian

Sven Haakanson, Associate Professor and Curator, Burke Museum, University of Washington

LaDonna Harris, President, Americans for Indian Opportunity

John Haworth, Senior Executive Emeritus, NMAI NY, Smithsonian Institution

Traci Morris, Director, American Indian Policy Institute, Arizona State University

Lotsee Patterson, Professor Emerita, University of Oklahoma

James Pepper Henry, Director, American Indian Cultural Center & Museum

Tim Tingle, Author, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

Della Warrior, Director, New Mexico Museum of Indian Arts and Culture