Testimony of
Annette Bryan, Councilwoman
For the
Puyallup Tribe of Indians
On the
"kʷaxʷad tiił ʔiišədčəł Act of 2026, H.R. 7269
(The Helping our People Act of 2026)
Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

September 17, 2026

Good morning, my name is Annette Bryan. I am a Councilwoman for the Puyallup Tribe of Indians. I would like to thank Chairman Hurd and Ranking Member Leger Fernandez for the opportunity to present this testimony on the "kʷaxʷad tiił ʔiišədčəł Act--the Helping our People Act of 2026, H.R. 7269. I would also like to thank Congresswoman Randall and Congresswoman Strickland for the introduction and support of this bill and for the Tribe. It has been unwavering.

The Puyallup Tribe is a federally recognized Tribe located in Pierce County, Washington along the shores of Commencement Bay, a large inlet of the Puget Sound. The Tribe is a signatory to the Treaty of Medicine Creek, Dec. 26, 1854, 10 Stat. 1132. Under this Treaty, the Tribe reserved the lands for its Reservation, which was established by two subsequent Executive Orders. Exec. Order Jan. 20, 1857; and Exec. Order Sept. 6, 1873. Pursuant to the Treaty, the Puyallup Tribe secured its approximately 20,000-acre Reservation as a permanent homeland for our Tribe. However, the ink had barely dried on the Treaty and the Executive Orders when concerted efforts were undertaken to take the Tribe's lands. Over the next fifty years after the Treaty, most of the land within our Reservation was taken as a result of spurious Acts of Congress, illegal sales of reservation land, and outright theft. *See* H.R. Rep. No. 101-57, at 3 (1989).

Despite these land takings, in 1983, the Tribe's title to the bed of the Puyallup River and adjacent lands, including lands within the Port of Tacoma, was confirmed by the federal court. *Puyallup Tribe v. Port of Tacoma*, 717 F.2d 1251 (9th Cir. 1983). This decision gave rise to an historic Settlement Agreement between twelve parties including the Tribe, the City of Tacoma, the Port of Tacoma, the State of Washington, and the Federal Government, which was enacted by Congress. *Puyallup Tribe of Indians Settlement Act of 1989*, Pub. L. 101-41 (1989). The Settlement Act restored to the Tribe nearly 1,000 acres of land, including lands within the Port of Tacoma.

An important part of the Settlement Act was the creation of a $22 million Permanent Trust for Tribal Members, with the income intended to support essential social services.

Under the Act, the corpus of the Trust Fund must be protected, and only the interest earned may be used for the purposes for which the Fund was established. This Fund was to be administered by a Board of Trustees, as established by the Act, and not by the Puyallup Tribal Government.

In the years following the enactment of the Settlement Act, the income generated from the Trust Fund, as invested by the Federal Government, has declined to the point that it is largely consumed by the operational costs of the Board of Trustees charged with administering the Fund, leaving little available to directly benefit Tribal members. As Trust income declined, social programs historically supported by the Trust have been reduced, eliminated, or assumed by the Tribal government.

In short, it is no longer financially sound to duplicate the Tribal government's extensive, experienced and well-trained staff with the costs of a separate Board of Trustees. While the Settlement Act provides a process for the dissolution of the Board of Trustees, it does not provide a process for the Tribal government to assume the management of the Trust Fund. Thus, in order for the Tribe to assume the management of the Trust Fund, we need an amendment to the Settlement Act that will permit the Tribe to withdraw the Trust Fund from the Federal Government and manage the Fund in accordance with the requirements of the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act of 1994.

Specifically, the proposed amendment would update the Settlement framework to reflect changes in federal trust law and the Tribe's demonstrated ability to manage the Trust Fund directly and responsibly. We need this amendment to the Act to allow the Tribe to address this long-standing challenge so that the Trust may serve its intended purposes of the Trust in a more effective and efficient manner, and with a structure that better serves our community and supports the original purpose of the Settlement Act We have in the past requested the withdrawal of the Trust Fund pursuant to the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act; however, the Department of Interior declined the request, stating that because the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act was enacted after the Puyallup Tribe of Indians Settlement Act, the Tribe cannot withdraw this Trust Fund and exercise its self-determination to manage these funds in accordance with federal law. As a result, the Tribe has been unable to pursue the process Congress made available to other federally-recognized Tribes.

Under the Helping our People Act, the Tribe would have the authority to seek to withdraw and manage the Trust Fund under a Secretarially approved plan, consistent with the American Indian Trust Fund Management Reform Act. The bill does not automatically transfer the Fund to the Tribe or approve a management plan. The Tribe must still go through the same federal approval process available to other Tribes. Specifically, the Tribe intends to convert the Fund into a professionally managed endowment that provides long-term, stable support for education, social services, and other core programs. This approach builds on the Tribe's strong record of financial

stewardship and is designed to support the long-term success of the Settlement while also aligning the Settlement Act with current federal trust management policy.

Finally, the bill will ensure that the Puyallup Tribe is not excluded from participating on the same basis as other federally recognized Tribes in programs and initiatives enacted after the Settlement Act just because the Act predates them. Agencies have at times incorrectly interpreted the Settlement Act to require otherwise. Nothing in the Settlement contemplated that the Puyallup Tribe would be treated differently from other federally recognized Tribes under federal laws Congress might enact in the future. This clarification would ensure the Tribe can benefit from generally applicable tribal legislation and all future Acts of Congress.

This amendment to the Puyallup Settlement Act does not request new funding or expanded entitlements, rather, it finally allows the Tribe to seek authority to manage its own resources under the same federal process available to other Tribes, consistent with federal policy. By modernizing the Settlement Act to reflect updated trust law and eliminating an outdated statutory barrier, this legislation would fulfill the original intent of the Settlement: to return land and resources to the Puyallup Tribe in a way that supports the self-determination and welfare of its members. The non-Tribal parties to the Settlement have been informed of the Tribe's proposed approach to the Permanent Trust and support this legislation. I would like to ask that the letters of support be included in the record of this hearing.

Since the passage of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians Settlement Act, the Puyallup Tribe has built its governmental capacity to provide a broad range of governmental services to our members, including comprehensive social services and education programs. We have built a foundation of strong financial integrity and management. It is time that we be allowed to seek approval to manage the Permanent Trust for Tribal Members, so that these resources can continue to provide for the ongoing needs of our members in way that has not been done for a very long time.

Thank you for your opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.