

Policy Memo

March 8, 2024

To: Washington State Governor's Office of Indian Affairs
Capitol Court Building
1110 Capitol Way S, Suite 225, Olympia, WA 98501

CC: Review Board for the Master of Public Administration Program
The Evergreen State College
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Re: Enhancing Support and Recognition for Urban Indian Communities in Washington State.

Executive Summary: The Indian Relocation Act of 1956, which aimed to assimilate American Indians into urban settings by offering various supports, resulted in significant long-term challenges including low-wage employment and discrimination, while also undermining Tribal sovereignty. Despite these challenges, Washington State, home to a substantial urban Indian population with an underscore of 29 federally recognized tribes, lacks specific laws or policies to support urban Indians. The state has made strides in acknowledging tribal sovereignty and collaborative governance through initiatives like the Centennial Accord and RCW 43.376, yet urban Indians remain largely overlooked in policy considerations. This memo outlines a policy recommendation to incorporate the Urban Indian community into the Centennial Accord and adopt the federal Urban Indian Organization Confer policy, thereby ensuring their inclusion in state policy development and support mechanisms.

Problem Definition: The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 initiated a massive migration of American Indians to urban areas, including Seattle under the premise of offering better opportunities. This effort, however, inadvertently led to a diminished tribal sovereignty and a slew of socio-economic challenges for the relocated populations. Fast forward to the present, over 70% of Washington State's Native American population, which are tribally enrolled, now lives in urban settings, largely overlooked by policies designed to support tribal communities. Washington State, with its 29 federally recognized tribes, has made commendable efforts towards recognizing tribal sovereignty and facilitating government-to-tribal consultations. Despite these efforts though, urban Native Americans remain in a policy blind spot, underserved by both state and federal initiatives and lacking representation in pivotal

accords like the Centennial Accord. This oversight results in inadequate support and recognition, undermining efforts towards inclusivity and equity.

Policy Recommendations

To address these challenges, this memo proposes the enactment of a new legislative framework that:

- Amends the Centennial Accord to explicitly recognize and include urban Indian communities. This inclusion will ensure that urban Indians are represented in annual meetings and discussions, allowing their needs and challenges to be addressed alongside those of federally recognized tribes.
- Adopts the Federal Urban Indian Organization Confer Policy. This policy will mandate state agencies to engage with urban Indian organizations in policy development, program implementation, and service provision, ensuring that urban Indians' voices are heard and considered in decisions affecting their communities.
- Establishes an Urban Indian Advisory Board composed of urban Indian representatives to provide guidance on urban Indian issues. The board will work closely with state agencies and the legislature to develop policies and programs that directly benefit urban Indian communities.

Enhance support for Urban Indian Health and Welfare by funding urban Indian health jurisdictions and epidemiology centers. Strengthening these entities will address the unique health challenges faced by urban Indians and improve overall community well-being.

Conclusion: The oversight of urban Indigenous communities in Washington State's policy framework has created a significant disparity in support and recognition, contrary to the state's commitments to inclusivity and tribal sovereignty. By adopting these recommendations, Washington State can begin to rectify these long-standing issues, extending its commitment to all Native Americans within its borders and fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for urban Native American communities.