

c/o Sorsha Anderson, Senior Staff Associate
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To: Rep. Janet Ancel, Chair
Means Committee

House Ways &

Re: House Bill H556 A Bill to exempt from the statewide education property tax and the municipal property tax all property owned by Native American tribes that have been recognized pursuant to 1 V.S.A. chapter 23 or owned by the nonprofit organizations that are organized for the benefit of those tribes.

Dear Rep. Ancel,

I am a resident of Quechee, VT. I have owned my property here for four years, and I have been a full-time resident for the past two years. I have Cherokee, Shawnee and Penobscot heritage and lived most of my life in Oklahoma. There, we have 39 federally recognized tribes. I am used to Native American culture being front and center wherever I go in my former home state. Since moving to Vermont, I miss my native culture! It is very hard to find it here. Even to find stores that cater to our needs, and/or are run by natives.

In my talks with the Chiefs of two of the state recognized Abenaki bands here, I have heard them talk about the land and property taxes they are forced to pay on the little land and property they actually have. It is appalling that the Abenaki here have no land, except for a small parcel in Barton, the tribal headquarters in Swanton, and tribal headquarters owned by Elnu and Koesek. They are paying thousands of dollars each year in taxes (the Missisquoi pay \$6,000 per year just for their headquarters building, they don't own land). As non-federally recognized tribes, they do not have a source of income other than donations. When taxes are due, they have to decide which services to halt in order to pay the tax bills. They are barely able to provide services for their peoples as it is. Much of their services rely on donations from non-native citizens.

This bill is critical to the survival of these four bands until they can receive federal recognition and/or consistent sources of revenue. In light of past treatment by the state and federal governments, and in keeping with tax policies on federal level and states within our federalist system, all tribes are to be exempt from paying property and land taxes. What we see in Oklahoma and other states with federally recognized tribes, is that when the tribes are doing well financially they give back to their states and communities, providing funding and services to schools and infrastructure. Vermont should take this under advisement. Investing in our tribes is an investment in our future on many levels, morally, socially, culturally, educationally and economically.

I encourage you to pass this bill. Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to express my concerns about this issue.

Sincerely,

Earl L. Hatley PO Box 146 Quechee, VT 05059