



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
OFFICE OF GOVERNOR DANIEL J. MCKEE

April 7, 2026

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley
Chair, House Committee on State Government & Elections
House Lounge, Rhode Island State House
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Re: *2026-H 7997 State Recognition*

Dear Chairman Shanley:

I write in opposition to H 7997, an Act Relating to State Affairs and Government–
Recognition of Native American Tribes (Act).

The Act would give state recognition to the Seaconke Wampanoag for the limited purpose of receiving certain enumerated benefits and protections for which Indian tribes or groups may be eligible. Recognition for the Seaconke Wampanoags would come through legislative fiat and would not involve a petition process common in other states with state recognized tribes.

The process for acknowledgement and recognition of Indian tribes is primarily a matter for the federal government. The Office of Federal Acknowledgment within the Bureau of Indian Affairs employs anthropologists, historians, and genealogists with special expertise to determine whether a petitioner should receive federal recognition. Some states also have state recognition processes. These states, like the federal government, rely on the expertise of professionals to make the determination and many have state offices or commissions dedicated to the management of Indian affairs.

Rhode Island state government does not currently have the resources to make accurate determinations about tribal existence. The Act does not establish a process that would include necessary input from anthropologists, historians, genealogists, or anyone else with the requisite expertise to make these determinations.

Adopting a process for the state recognition of Indian tribes is deserving of careful consideration, including hearing the concerns of Indians and Indian communities in Rhode Island. Their input on what would be pertinent and achievable criteria for recognition is important, as are their views on the process for recognition. In the past, the

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Administration has offered some suggestions for a process that would be more in line with the recognition processes in other states and would involve the input and expertise of professionals. The Administration stands ready to provide similar assistance again this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Claire Richards". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire Richards
Executive Counsel

cc: Honorable Members of the Committee on State Government & Elections
Honorable Scott A. Slater
Nicole McCarty, Esq.