



North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:

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Chairman Shauer, members of the committee, for the record my name is Collette Brown Representative from District 9 which encompasses the TMBCI and SLT and I want to thank you for the opportunity to introduce my second bill I drafted from discussions with the honorable UND President Armacost. I am here to propose a bill that seeks to assist with the implementation and compliance of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) with an appropriation amount of five million dollars to be administer through the North Dakota State Historical Society.

HB1603, a bill that is not only necessary for compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) but also a critical step in strengthening the partnership between North Dakota Tribes and the North Dakota Historical Society (NDHS). With some key amendments and the inclusion of Tribal experts to provide full insight, this bill will ensure North Dakota's commitment to repatriation is both comprehensive and just.

NAGPRA was enacted in 1990 to ensure that Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony are returned to their rightful descendants and communities. The law is grounded in principles of respect for Native peoples' cultural heritage, history, and sacred traditions. However, despite the importance of this legislation, many institutions across the United States, including those in our own state, have struggled with the complex and resource-intensive processes of identifying, cataloging, and repatriating cultural items in their collections.

For too long, the process of repatriation has faced roadblocks due to a lack of resources, funding, and coordination. This bill is an important step toward addressing those challenges in North Dakota. The North Dakota Historical Society (NDHS) is an institution entrusted with the care of state collections, many of which may contain items that are subject to NAGPRA. Yet, like many institutions, Tribes along with NDHS face significant logistical, financial, and staffing barriers that have slowed the compliance process.

HB1603 provides a path forward by equipping both tribes and institutions with the necessary tools to ensure full compliance with NAGPRA. By investing in staffing, training, and consultation, we are not only facilitating the return of human remains and sacred objects but also reinforcing a long-term partnership built on trust and mutual respect.

The federal government currently allocates approximately \$2 million annually to support NAGPRA compliance efforts, providing essential grants to tribes and institutions for consultation, documentation, and repatriation to 584 Tribes.

By passing HB1603, we position North Dakota to ensure that our state, tribal governments, and institutions have the resources needed to fulfill our legal and ethical responsibilities. This funding can directly support staffing, training, and administrative costs, making compliance feasible for all stakeholders involved.

The repatriation of human remains, and cultural items is an essential act of healing for Native American communities who have long sought the return of their ancestors. It is also an opportunity for North Dakota to set a precedent as a leader in ethical museum practices and tribal relations. Through the establishment of a committee comprised of representatives from both NDHS and Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, we ensure that decisions are made collaboratively, prioritizing projects that have the most significant impact on repatriation efforts. A timeline for repatriation is necessary, ensuring that we are not simply making promises but committing to tangible action. This repatriation effort reflects a shared responsibility between NDHS and tribal nations to uphold the spirit and letter of NAGPRA, demonstrating that North Dakota values the cultural dignity and sovereignty of its Indigenous peoples.

HB1603 is not just about compliance, it is about doing what is right. It is about reconciliation, healing, and honoring the sovereignty of the North Dakota Tribes. By bringing together the NDHS, North Dakota Tribes, and state resources, this bill ensures that repatriation is carried out with the dignity and urgency it deserves. It is an opportunity for our state to do its part in promoting cultural understanding, reconciliation, and stewardship of Native American heritage. By supporting the North Dakota Historical Society in this important work, we not only uphold the integrity of the law but also contribute to the healing and strengthening of relationships between our state and the Native communities we serve.

Lastly, I have some honorable experts that would like to speak on this matter, and I would like to request this amended bill be held over as I may have one more amendment coming for HB1603. I will be gathering more insight from another Tribal expert to ensure that North Dakota leads by example in fulfilling our commitments under NAGPRA.

Thank you for your time and consideration.