

Testimony of Chairwoman Lonna J. Street, Spirit Lake Nation 1.31.2025

In Support of HB 1603 Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation

Dear Government and Veterans Affairs Committee Members,

My name is Lonna J. Street, and I serve as Chairwoman of the Spirit Lake Nation. I am writing today in strong support of HB 1603, which will provide necessary funding to protect Native American graves and support repatriation efforts.

For far too long, throughout Native Country our ancestors' remains and sacred items have been taken, displayed, or stored away in institutions, far from where they belong. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was meant to address this, yet decades later, many of our ancestors still have not been returned home. This bill is a step in the right direction; it will provide the resources needed to help make sure our peoples' remains and sacred items are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

To our native people, the remains of our ancestors are not artifacts. They are our grandmothers and grandfathers. Their burial sites are sacred, and their spirits deserve to rest in peace, not be boxed away in museums or universities. Repatriation is about more than compliance with the law; it is about righting a historical wrong. It is about healing.

HB 1603 will help ensure that the work of returning our ancestors is properly funded and prioritized. This is not just an issue for Native people; it is a matter of basic human dignity. If the graves of your ancestors were disturbed and their remains were taken, you would want them brought home, too. That is all we are asking for.

I urge you to pass this bill and support the protection and repatriation of Native remains and sacred items. This is about respect. This is about doing what is right.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chairwoman Lonna J. Street
Spirit Lake Nation