

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
RAMONA KITTO STATELY, PROJECT DIRECTOR, WE ARE STILL HERE MINNESOTA
SUBMITTED FEBRUARY 17, 2021
TO THE MINNESOTA SENATE EDUCATION FINANCE AND POLICY COMMITTEE

The Honorable Roger C. Chamberlain
Chair, Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3225
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Chamberlain and committee members:

On behalf of We Are Still Here Minnesota (WASH-MN), I thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony in support of certain provisions in S.F. 960 (Chamberlain).

WASH-MN is a project of the Native Governance Center, a St. Paul-based nonprofit, comprising Native American and non-Native volunteers from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, all working to make the public narrative about Native Americans and tribal nations more accurate and visible in education and popular culture.

Among the many important Indian education and Native American-related provisions in the bill, there are two which we believe are especially deserving of the committee's consideration:

- **Indigenous Education for All** (Article 2, Section 8 and Section 28, Subd. 28). Most school children are exposed to only a very limited and often inaccurate portrayal of Native-related subject matter. Further, it is widely admitted in education circles that most educators feel unprepared to teach Native American topics and are self-conscious about the gaps in their knowledge. This proposal would give school districts and educators better tools for instructing both non-Native and Native students about the state's Indigenous peoples, their history and culture; the important contributions which Native Americans have made and are making in the state; and the contemporary, lived experience of Native communities.
- **Tribal nations relations training for school leaders** (Article 3, Section 4, Subd. 9). Minnesota's eleven tribal nations are located throughout Greater Minnesota; enjoy mutually beneficial collaborations with other governmental bodies and private-sector partners; and are leading employers in their respective regions of the state, to the advantage of their own communities and their neighbors. Nevertheless, the nature and role of tribal governments remain too little understood; in the field of K-12 education, this lack of understanding can inhibit the spirit of cooperation and respectful relations. This proposal would give school board members and administrators a structured introduction to and background knowledge about tribal governments, their workings and relationships with other governments, similar to the highly successful tribal relations training which has been made available to state agency personnel.

The Minnesota Constitution, Article XIII, Section 1, says that "[t]he stability of a republican form of government depend[s] mainly upon the intelligence of the people." We believe that these two proposals can enhance the intelligence of Minnesota's next generation of citizens and those who teach them by fully recognizing, understanding and appreciating the first residents of our great state and their contemporary descendants. The results can be a more harmonious and prosperous future for all of our children.