

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1732

TITLE: Resolution in Support Indigenous Peoples Day and Native Heritage Month

AUTHOR(S): Senator Cassandra Urbenz, Senator Donal Bissainte, Senator Anusha Chaudhary, Senator Austin Britton

SPONSOR(S): Senator Antonio Hendricks

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples’ Day was October 14th, 2024, and November is National American Indian Heritage Month, thereafter commonly referred to as Native American Heritage Month; and,

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples’ Day recognizes and honors the enduring contributions, culture, history, and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples across the Americas and their ongoing relationship with their ancestral lands [1-3]; and,

WHEREAS, the United Nations recognizes the International Day of Indigenous People to protect rights [3]; and,

WHEREAS, an estimated 3.2 million individuals identified solely as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN), representing 1.3% of the U.S. population in 2022 [4]; and,

WHEREAS, over 8.5 million Americans identified as AI/AN either alone or in combination with one or more other races in 2022 [4]; and,

WHEREAS, Native individuals may to choose not to self-identify as AI/AN for a variety of reasons, largely as a result of cultural erasure and pervasiveness of colonial concepts such as “blood quantum”; and,

WHEREAS, “blood quantum” refers to the amount of so-called “Indian blood” that an individual possesses, appearing as a fraction based on an individual’s family tree, and is a concept that lacks any scientific basis and is rooted in eugenics” [13]; and,

WHEREAS, Florida has three federally recognized Native American tribes: the Seminole, the Miccosukee and the Poarch Creeks [6]; and,

WHEREAS, anyone with an internet connection can use the free resources of Native Land Digital (native-land.ca) to explore which tribes formerly occupied land in which they occupy including territories, languages, and treaties [14]; and,

WHEREAS, Gainesville was the first city in Florida to change the name of the holiday from Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day in 2018 [9]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida is located on lands that were once home to the Timucua and Seminole peoples, and it is important to acknowledge the historical significance of these lands and the role of Indigenous communities [10 - 11]; and,

WHEREAS, in continued noncompliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), thousands of remains still rest nonconsensually on the University of Florida campus in Dickinson Hall [15,16]; and,

WHEREAS, children were taken from their homes, separated from their culture, and endured extensive abuse at boarding/residential schools across the United States and Canada [18]; and,

WHEREAS, as recently as 2013 Phyllis Webstad, a Northern Secwepemc (Shuswap) residential school survivor from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation had her new orange shirt taken away from her on her first day of residential school, an example of how recently First Nation people have experienced such traumas and a story exemplifying how vital truth & reconciliation is [17]; and,

WHEREAS, assault, abduction, and murder of tribal members, with "a 2016 study by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) found that more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women (84.3 percent) have experienced violence in their lifetime, including 56.1 percent who have experienced sexual violence", and there is an ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) [19]; and,

WHEREAS, there are Native-lead initiatives, collectives, and groups who lead activism that support these issues, such as Lakota Law Project & NDN Collective [20,21]; and,

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples have faced and continue to face systemic oppression, cultural erasure, and displacement, and it is crucial to recognize these injustices to work toward reconciliation and justice [12]; and,

WHEREAS, the celebration of these observances serves as an opportunity to challenge historical narratives that have marginalized Indigenous voices and to foster greater awareness and education about Indigenous history and contemporary issues; and,

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples' Day provides an opportunity to reflect on the importance of environmental stewardship, as Indigenous communities have long been advocates for the protection and sustainable management of natural resources; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida has local chapters of national organizations like Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS), Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), and the American Indian in Science and Engineering Society (AISES) that support Indigenous students' professional development and overall well-being; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples' Day, as well as November as Native American Heritage Month, and encourages the university community to honor the contributions of Indigenous peoples throughout history and today.

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate encourages the university administration to institutionalize the observance of Native holidays through annual events, educational programs, and public statements that honor Indigenous histories and cultures.

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports efforts to increase the visibility of Indigenous peoples on campus, including expanding partnerships with Indigenous communities, promoting Indigenous studies, and incorporating Indigenous perspectives into academic curricula.

THEREFORE, LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate urges student leaders to engage in truth & reconciliation, support Native movements, and engage with the history of the land they occupy.

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate affirms its commitment to social justice, equality, and respect for Indigenous rights and will continue to work with campus and community partners to address issues of systemic inequality, cultural erasure, and environmental sustainability.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to the Harn Museum of Art's Museum director Lee Anne Chesterfield, Gator American Indian in Engineering and Science Co-Presidents Jillian Wessel and Tabby Patrick, Indigenous-American Student Association president Bobbi Leonard, the American Indian and Indigenous Studies chair, the Smathers Libraries Land Acknowledgment Task Force, Matherson History Museum executive director Salvatore J. Cumella, and the Gainesville Cultural Affairs director Roxana Gonzalez.

[1] <https://news.fullerton.edu/spotlight/honoring-native-american-heritage-month/>

[2] <https://attheu.utah.edu/announcements/recognizing-indigenous-peoples-day-at-the-u/>

- [3] <https://www.un.org/en/observances/indigenous-day>
- [4] [American Indian/Alaska Native Health.](#)
- [5] [A Proclamation on Indigenous Peoples' Day, 2021 | The White House](#)
- [6] [Florida's Indians: Past And Present.](#)
- [7] <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2023/8081/BillText/Filed/PDF>
- [8] [Indigenous Peoples' Day Ceremony](#)
- [9] <https://www.ordinancewatch.com/files/82613/LocalGovernment124802.pdf>
- [10] <https://uflib.ufl.edu/about/user-policies/land-acknowledgment/>
- [11] <https://waterinstitute.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/land-aknowledgement-for-web.pdf>
- [12] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/indigenous-peoples/>
- [13] <https://nativegov.org/resources/blood-quantum-and-sovereignty-a-guide/>
- [14] <https://native-land.ca>
- [15] <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>
- [16] <https://www.alligator.org/article/2023/07/uf-efforts-to-preserve-native-american-history-remain-despite-implications-from-new-legislation>
- [17] <https://orangeshirtday.org/phyllis-story/>
- [18] <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/code-talkers/boarding-schools/>
- [19] <https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis>
- [20] <https://lakotalaw.org/>
- [21] <https://ndncollective.org/>