



25th Navajo Nation Council

25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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25th Navajo Nation Council demands respect for Indigenous graduates

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Members of the 25th Navajo Nation Council expressed disappointment with the recent disrespectful treatment of a Native American student during the 2024 Farmington High School graduation ceremony, which occurred on Monday, May 13. The family of the graduate alleges that during the graduation ceremony, school officials forced the student to remove a beaded cap and a traditional feather that symbolize the significance of the Hunkpapa Lakota people.

“School officials across the country need to be reminded who the first Americans are and whose land they inhabit. No student in any school should be prohibited from wearing regalia that signifies their cultural and spiritual beliefs. These actions are belittling, humiliating, and demeaning to the student and her family. There is no place for this type of behavior in our educational systems. The school officials owe an apology to the student and her family. We are calling on the school to meet with Navajo Nation leadership to discuss this matter,” said 25th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley.

In video footage, Genesis White Bull, a graduating senior at Farmington High School, was instructed to remove her culturally adorned graduation cap, embellished with an eagle plume. Shockingly, school officials are reported to have cut the plume from her cap using scissors. Brenda White Bull, Genesis’ mother, emphasized the sacred significance of the plume, which symbolizes achievement and cultural identity, marking Genesis’ transition into new phases of her life.

The 25th Navajo Nation Council stands in solidarity with all tribal members and their right to honor their culture by donning traditional attire during significant ceremonies such as high school graduations. Tribal communities should not be subjected to the perpetuation of generational trauma through discriminatory actions, particularly during celebratory events like graduations.

“Our children will lead our nations. As parents we must ensure their paths are clear of these obstacles that hinder progress. As tribal nations, our people are strong and resilient. We consistently overcome these instances of discrimination and disrespect, but we expect reconciliation from the Farmington High School administration and school board. We support Genesis and the way in which she honors her cultural teachings,” Speaker Curley added.

Council members also affirmed that the incident violates the New Mexico Indian Education Act and the Yazzie/Martinez court ruling, a landmark ruling in 2018 with far reaching impacts for Native American students in public school systems in the state of New Mexico. The Indian

Education Act also provides additional protections for cultural teachings and practices within school systems throughout the state.

“The cultural identity of all Native American students attending Farmington High School are protected under the New Mexico Indian Education Act. The recent graduation incident that took place at Farmington Hight School is a clear violation of their rights. As we move forward in addressing this issue, we will be meeting with the school board and administration,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty.

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