

Let the feathers fly at High School Graduation

Recently, the Caney Valley Public Schools superintendent denied a graduating Native American student's request to wear her sacred eagle feather on her graduation cap during the upcoming commencement ceremony. Unfortunately, this is not the first time an Oklahoma school district has prohibited a Native American student from demonstrating this very sincere form of cultural and religious expression during one of life's most significant occasions.

In many Native American cultures, the eagle feather symbolizes strength, nobility, courage, perseverance, respect and wisdom. Leaders and elders only gift eagle feathers in times of great achievement. For Native American students, receiving an eagle feather or plume in honor of graduation is as important as the diploma. Native American students incorporate the eagle feather or plume into their graduation regalia by attaching it to their graduation cap or tassel. By adorning the eagle feather or plume during the commencement ceremony, Native American students express both their religious and cultural beliefs, while honoring their Native American heritage. Wearing the eagle feather or plume is a great badge of honor and pride. Banning this dress demeans and hurts students.

School administrators generally cite commencement ceremony policies in student handbooks as the basis for denying a Native American student's request to wear eagle feathers. In the past, school administrators have denied requests based on policies establishing a strict no adornment dress code during commencement; policies prohibiting disruptive activity; and even school tradition. Despite these seemingly reasonable explanations, requiring Native American students to strip away all outward signs of their association with tribal life is a direct assault on the students' identities and brings to mind the infamous maxim, "Kill the Indian, save the man."

In this instance, tribal leaders and citizens should reconsider protesting the school's policy by ignoring the disrespectful policy and wearing an eagle feather or plume during the commencement ceremony anyway. As a practical matter, schools have much leeway to make and enforce commencement ceremony rules. Ignoring the policy could have bad consequences:

the school might permit a student to graduate, but she may not get her diploma at the ceremony or the school might ban the student from participating in the ceremony at all.

An alternative protest approach for tribal leaders, citizens and students would be to petition school boards to change their commencement ceremony policies. In January 2015, graduating Native American students in Grand Forks, North Dakota, secured their right to wear eagle feathers during the upcoming graduation ceremonies by successfully persuading the school administration to change the commencement ceremony dress policies. Grand Forks Public Schools previously enforced a strict no adornment dress code policy at high school graduations which, in the past, used to deny Native American students' requests. After facing strong opposition from many organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Native American Rights Fund, and individuals in the community, the Grand Forks school district administrators came to understand and respect these beliefs and unanimously decided to change the dress code policy.

The vast majority (92 percent) of Native American students attend local public schools operated by state and local education authorities. In this modern era, schools should support and respect the expression of cultural identity and Native American heritage. The celebration and honor of educational advancement through high school graduation ceremonies should reflect the diversity of our Native American students. We encourage tribal leaders to reach out to state and local education authorities as soon as possible. Ask the school boards to respect this deeply-held tribal tradition by permitting Native American students to include an eagle feather or eagle plume on their graduation regalia during commencement ceremonies.

If you have any questions regarding how to handle a restrictive graduation dress code policy, please contact Courtney R. Jordan, D. Michael McBride III or any other member of Crowe & Dunlevy's Indian Law & Gaming practice group.

Contact: Courtney R. Jordan
405.235.7779 D. Michael McBride III
918.592.9824



Veterans Memorial Day Powwow: (From Left) Ursula Hill, Lela Walker, Cheryl McClellan and outgoing Honor Guard Princess Regan Hill. (SFNews photo)

Thank You

The family would like to thank the many family, neighbors and friends during the recent passing of our beloved son, brother, uncle, nephew, cousin and friend of Cody Ray Tyner. Your thoughts, prayers, words of encouragement, presence and love offerings so graciously given are greatly appreciated.

We would like to personally thank the following: SF Enrollment staff; Williams Grocery; Western Marketing; JB's Smoke Shop; Rev. Thomas and Beatrice Morris; the Morris boys; Rev. Jeremy and Angie Jackson; Bear Clan, Clan helpers, cooks and Grave Diggers; the Barron family of St. Louis; the Cummins family of Poplar Bluff, MO; Jamey and Georgia Ann Noble; Cheryl McClellan; SF Employee Committee; Stella Wilson and family; Johnnie Kay Murphy and family; Alumni Class of '07; Eugenia Tyner-Dawson; Mike and Sandy Harris; and Cody's co-workers.

Special thanks and praise goes to the SF Maintenance Department for all their hard work to make sure everything we needed was there; to those that sang the traveling song-it was so beautiful; and to my son Joe Estes who took on the lead role for the family. He did an excellent job throughout the services and I am very proud of him. We couldn't have made it through without all these many blessings, which we are continuing to receive. Words cannot truly convey what is in our hearts, but we would like to say, "Thank you all so very much."

Mary Brown and family

Food Distribution Program Updates

FDPIR Income Guidelines: New Deductions Expected to Boost Participation Nationwide

With our increased FY14 Net Monthly Income Standards, new income deduction rules were also approved in the CFR. Households that pay rent or utilities, regardless of amount, are now allowed a Standard \$300 Deduction of their Net Monthly Income that is measured against the USDA Net Monthly Income Standards. For elderly or disabled household members there is now a Medical Expense Deduction that can be claimed for all out of pocket medical expenses with no limit regarding the amount. Also there is a new Meal Deduction that can be claimed should a household member require the full time services of a home health worker.

For more information on these deductions or to see if you qualify please call (866) 622-2310 Shawnee Office or (800) 256-3398 Stroud Office.

Peggy Big Eagle for Second Chief



"Thunder Clan"
"Ki-wa-no"
Sac & Fox Nation
2015

If elected I would work to have more tribal members' input.

Committee vacancies could be advertised until filled and committee minutes published through the SFN website and SFN News. All meetings of the B.C., even informational meetings, would be open and announced in advance.

If elected I would work to improve efficiency for SFN.

The B.C. could streamline personnel and finance procedures and provide understandable financial reports for Council.

If elected I would work to have correct SFN enrollment records.

Combining Oklahoma SFN blood quantum with Mesquakie and Nemaha blood quantum has gone on for so long that every enrollment record would need to be checked. It will be a huge undertaking to record SFN blood quantum separately. Council directed that it be done two years ago, so it needs to be a B.C. priority.

Peggy Big Eagle for Second Chief

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or see my Facebook page

Sac and Fox Nation
Food Distribution Program

CALL TODAY TO SEE IF YOU QUALIFY!!!

STROUD OFFICE
(800) 256-3398

SHAWNEE OFFICE
(866) 622-2310

If at least one member of your household is Native American, you reside within our service area, and you meet our income guidelines...
You May Qualify. Call Today!!!

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