



Legislation Text

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**CITY OF SEATTLE**

**RESOLUTION \_\_\_\_\_**

A RESOLUTION supporting the creation of a United States Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools and other actions to address the lasting harm of Indian boarding schools.

WHEREAS, we acknowledge that we are on the homelands of Chief Si'ahl (Seattle), who was a Chief of the

dxw'dəwʔábš (People-of-the-Inside), now known as the Duwamish Tribe of Indians. We acknowledge that the Duwamish River flows through lands adjacent to the Salish Sea that have been occupied and stewarded by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We honor our Indigenous relatives by committing ourselves to the ongoing relationship that exists between Indigenous peoples and these places; and

WHEREAS, we envision a city whose success, safety, and health are exemplified through our collective work:

a city where all community members and visitors have the freedom, agency, and platform to share and amplify their true and accurate history, language, cultures and experiences. At the same time, we acknowledge that our actions-both conscious and unconscious, past and present-have benefited some communities while limiting opportunities and outcomes for others, notably for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. The City of Seattle works toward our vision by addressing and working to eliminate institutional racism and to repair the damage caused by harmful policies and behaviors in programs and practices; and

WHEREAS, boarding schools for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (“Indian boarding schools”) were established by the United States Government to strip American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children of their Indigenous identities, beliefs, and languages, in order to

assimilate them into non-Indian culture, through federally funded, Christian-denomination schools, which had the effect of cultural genocide; and

WHEREAS, Indian boarding schools employed practices including assimilation, corporal punishments, and child labor, which were often carried out without law or policy; and

WHEREAS, the deliberate intention of Indian boarding schools was the separation of Native American children from their families, cultures, and Tribal communities through removal, cutting their hair, taking their clothing and issuing uniforms, forbidding them to speak their language or engage in any cultural practices, and carrying out severe and often corporal punishments constituting, in many cases, physical, emotional, and mental torture for non-compliance, including the forced sterilization of Native American women; and

WHEREAS, Indian boarding schools were created through the Indian Civilization Fund Act of 1819, which was created to administer the education, healthcare, and rations promised to Tribal Nations under treaty law, and President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy of 1868, which opened the Civilization Funds to be used by churches; and

WHEREAS, as a result of those laws, over 367 Indian boarding schools were established and run by the government and religious organizations located throughout the United States. Children as young as three years of age were sent away to Indian boarding schools across Washington State and, in many cases, Native American children were sent out of state; and

WHEREAS, by 1926, nearly 83 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native school-age children were taken and enrolled in Indian boarding schools in the United States, but because nearly 62 percent of the school records have been lost or destroyed, the full extent of the Indian boarding school policy has not been identified; and

WHEREAS, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 2016 asking how many

boarding schools the government funded, how many children attended, and how many went missing or died at the schools, and the BIA responded that they could not answer because research would need to be done; and

WHEREAS, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) through independent research has only been able to locate records for 38 percent of the 367 listed boarding schools. Records for approximately 62 percent of the schools on the list are in unknown locations, including records of children who lived in the State of Washington and neighboring states; and

WHEREAS, in June 2021 Secretary of the Interior Debra Haaland announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to create a comprehensive review of the troubled legacy of federal Indian boarding school policies; and

WHEREAS, Secretary Haaland said the program would “shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past, no matter how hard it will be ... but only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future we are proud to embrace”; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative will serve as an investigation about the loss of human life and the lasting consequences of residential Indian boarding schools, the primary goal of which will be to identify boarding school facilities and sites, the location of known and possible student burial sites located at or near school facilities, and the identities and Tribal affiliations of students interred at such locations; and

WHEREAS, the work will proceed in several phases and include the identification and collection of records and information related to the Department of the Interior’s own oversight and implementation of the Indian boarding school program, with formal consultations across the nation; and

WHEREAS, NABS is working with members of the U.S. Congress to create a U.S. Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools Act to be introduced in 2021; NOW, THEREFORE,

**BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE, THE MAYOR**

**CONCURRING, THAT:**

Section 1. The City of Seattle supports the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative by the U.S. Department of the Interior to do the following:

A. Investigate the loss of human life and lasting consequences of residential boarding schools for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (“Indian boarding schools”), specifically by identifying boarding school facilities and sites; the location of known and possible student burial sites located at or near school facilities, and the identities and Tribal affiliations of children interred at such locations.

B. Conduct a survey of historical records in federal repositories such as the National Archives and the American Indian Records Repository, as well as non-governmental organization records, and prepare a report detailing these historical records.

C. Consult with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and Native Hawaiian organizations to determine the nature and scope of proposed work concerning Indian boarding schools prior to beginning such work.

Section 2. The City of Seattle supports ongoing consultation on how to identify and protect burial sites and historical documents about the history of abuse at Indian boarding schools, to use these locations and historical records to show the scope and impact of Indian boarding schools, and to shed light on how federal Indian boarding schools contributed to cultural genocide in our country.

Section 3. The City of Seattle supports congressional approval of a U.S. Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools Act. The Act, when introduced, would establish the first formal commission in United States history to investigate, document, and acknowledge past injustices of the federal government’s cultural genocide and assimilation practices, which would build on the Department of the Interior’s Initiative.

Section 4. The City of Seattle supports these actions as a step toward creating a more just future, one in which similar sanctioned abuse, neglect, and harm against children and families shall be prevented and never again be repeated.

Adopted by the City Council the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021, and signed by me in open session in authentication of its adoption this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

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President \_\_\_\_\_ of the City Council

The Mayor concurred the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

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Jenny A. Durkan, Mayor

Filed by me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2021.

Monica Martinez Simmons, City Clerk

(Seal)