



2026 Winter Convention Portland, Oregon

RESOLUTION # 2026 – 001

“CALLING UPON ALL IDAHO, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO ADOPT A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SMUDGING AND CEREMONIAL POLICY TO SUPPORT AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE STUDENTS, EMPLOYEES, AND TRIBAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS”

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants rights secured under Indian Treaties and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and several states, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following Resolution:

WHEREAS, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) are the representatives and advocates for national, regional, and specific Tribal concerns; and

WHEREAS, the ATNI is a regional organization comprised of American Indians/Alaska Natives and Indian Tribal governments in the states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Northern California, and Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the health, safety, welfare, education, economic and employment opportunity, and preservation of cultural and natural resources are primary goals and objectives of ATNI; and

WHEREAS, cultural and spiritual practices have existed since time immemorial across Tribal Nations throughout the Pacific Northwest, and smudging is a traditional way of cleansing, prayer, healing, and preparation in ceremony and daily life; and

WHEREAS, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and employees in institutions of higher education may rely on smudging and related ceremonial practices for spiritual wellness, mental health, cultural continuity, grief support, identity grounding, and traditional medicine practices; and

WHEREAS, many AI/AN students, employees, and community members experience barriers to practicing smudging and other ceremonies such as pipe ceremonies in campus facilities due to state and local administrative codes, inconsistent institutional practices, lack of clear policy, lack of designated spaces, limited education and awareness, and case-by-case decision making left to individual faculty, staff, supervisors, or event managers; and

WHEREAS, inconsistent responses to smudging requests can result in harm to AI/AN students, employees, and community members, including experiences of microaggressions, repeated burden of explanation, fear of retaliation, exclusion from academic or workplace environments, and unequal access to cultural and spiritual supports and resources; and

WHEREAS, a unified policy approach is critical so that the responsibility for establishing and defending smudging and ceremonial practices is not placed on AI/AN students, employees, and Tribal Nations, and so that institutions can “lean in” with respectful, welcoming, and culturally sustaining practices; and

WHEREAS, AI/AN students and employees may need to smudge in moments of immediate distress or prior to entering certain learning spaces, and requiring burdensome notice requirements or delays may unreasonably prevent timely access to spiritual support and cultural safety, where cultural and safety considerations must be addressed through consistent and informed implementation planning for a campus smudge and ceremony space; and

WHEREAS, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 affirms the right of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian to believe, express, and exercise their traditional religions, including access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites; and

WHEREAS, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the free exercise of religion, and federal law supersedes state law when conflicts occur in matters of religious freedom; and

WHEREAS, Washington State law includes RCW 28B.137.010 regarding reasonable accommodation for religious holidays, reflecting the importance of religious accommodation within institutions of higher education; and

WHEREAS, without clear and consistent policy guidance, some AI/AN students and employees may be denied the full exercise of religious and cultural freedom when the ability to

smudge is treated as discretionary or dependent upon individual approval, rather than protected through institutional policy; and

WHEREAS, best practices should be developed and shared to support institutions in establishing designated spaces, immediate access options, facility coordination, education and training, culturally sustaining procedures that uphold Tribal sovereignty and cultural rights, and “good neighbor” practices in shared environments, including reasonable steps to address air quality needs and potential allergies; now

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that ATNI calls upon Idaho, Oregon, and Washington State institutions of higher education to develop, adopt, and implement a campus culturally responsive smudging and ceremonial policy that supports and protects the cultural and spiritual practices of AI/AN students and employees; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that ATNI calls for policy development and review processes to include Tribal cultural committees, elders, Tribal leaders, cultural specialists, Native-serving offices, Tribal directors and liaisons, and institutional civil rights and compliance offices as appropriate; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that ATNI calls upon Idaho, Oregon, and Washington State agencies to include, but not limited to, those reporting to the Governor, institutions of higher education, and other public entities to support coordinated efforts to recognize and protect AI/AN ceremonial practices, including smudging, across state property and state-serving institutions; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this will be the policy of ATNI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution(s).

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing Resolution was adopted at the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians 2026 Winter Convention held at the Hilton Portland Downtown in Portland, Oregon, on February 1-5, 2026, with a quorum present.



Leonard Forsman, President



Norma Jean Louie, Secretary