



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF TRIBAL HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION OFFICERS**

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January 30, 2025

Hon. Tom Cole  
Chair  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Rosa DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Mike Simpson  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Chellie Pingree  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and  
Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, Chair Simpson, and Ranking Member Pingree:

The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) respectfully requests that you adopt the Senate's proposed funding in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations for implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. The Senate Committee on Appropriations has included an increase of \$500,000 for the Department of the Interior specifically to begin implementation of STOP Act enforcement. This appropriation, which is distinct from, and in addition to, appropriations for other cultural heritage programs, is vital to the success of the STOP Act.

NATHPO is the only national organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. Founded in 1998, NATHPO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership association of Tribal government officials who implement federal and Tribal preservation laws. NATHPO empowers Tribal preservation leaders protecting culturally important places that perpetuate Native identity, resilience, and cultural endurance. Connections to cultural heritage sustain the health and vitality of Native peoples.

Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) often conduct repatriation activities for their respective Tribes. The illicit trade in Native American tangible cultural heritage poses a challenge for THPOs and is a grave threat to the cultural survival of Indian Tribes. Their sacred and cultural items are illegally taken from their people, threatening the preservation of their cultures and traditions, and depriving them of the legacy they seek to leave for future generations. Meanwhile, a lucrative black market in their tangible cultural heritage thrives and many of their sacred and cultural items end up abroad. Once abroad, Tribes have had very little success in efforts to bring them home.

The STOP Act represents a major step toward halting the illicit trade of Tribal Nations' tangible cultural resources. The law includes provisions that make it more difficult to export those items and easier for Tribes to regain their cultural heritage from abroad. The law explicitly prohibits exporting cultural heritage objects obtained in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and puts in place an export certification system to accompany the prohibition. Together, these measures make it possible for Tribes to access other countries' domestic laws and law enforcement mechanisms to regain their cultural heritage. The STOP

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Act also confirmed the President's authority to enter into agreements under a 1970 international treaty to request from other countries return of Tribes' cultural heritage and increased penalties for violations of NAGPRA.

We urge you to support including an increase of \$500,000 to begin implementation of STOP Act enforcement. As important as it was for the STOP Act to be passed by Congress and signed into law, without funding for enforcement the promise of the law is not fulfilled. As work on Fiscal Year 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill is completed, an increase of \$500,000 for the Department of the Interior specifically to begin implementation of the STOP Act is greatly needed.

Thank you for considering our important request to retain implementation funding for the STOP Act. We look forward to your positive response and are available to discuss this matter further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie J. Grussing". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "V" and "G".

Valerie J. Grussing, PhD  
Executive Director