



Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians
Historically known as "San Juan Bautista Band and San Juan Band" Indians of California
PO Box 5272 | Galt, CA 95622

October 21, 2019

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

Re: Considerations and Recommendations for Truth and Healing Council

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our Tribe is comprised of the descendants of the indigenous peoples taken to missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz. Our traditional tribal territory encompasses all of Santa Cruz and San Benito counties and parts of Santa Clara and Monterey counties. We are a federally unrecognized tribe.

When Governor Newsome offered an apology, through executive order, to California Native American Peoples, my first thought was that this apology will not be accepted by our Tribe. Our Tribe has a policy that we do not accept apologies. When our Tribe hears apologies, we see it as an attempt to sweep the horrific truths of Native history from public view. It is as if to say, "Yes, some terrible things happened to California Native Americans in the past, but let's just move on." We believe there can be no effective change in how the State of California acts toward its native population going forward, without acknowledging the whole truth regarding what happened historically to the native peoples of California AND specifically understanding how it continues to impact us today.

When Governor Newsome offered to develop a Truth and Healing Council, our Tribe became very interested in this. Our Amah Mutsun Tribe has unique experiences and perspectives on truth and healing. Since October 2009, our Tribe has held bi-monthly Tribal Wellness Meetings. Our Wellness Meetings are designed to help Tribal members deal with the effects of historic trauma caused by the three periods of brutal colonization. The Spanish/missions period, the Mexican period and the California/American period. Each of these periods sought to destroy and exterminate our traditional culture, spirituality and relationship with our environment. At our Wellness Meetings we address this difficult history through open and honest talking circles. For this reason, our meetings are attended by Tribal Psychiatrist, Dr. Donna Schindler, who has approximately 23 years' experience working with indigenous peoples in the field of historic trauma. Also attending our meeting are two Tribal Psychologists, a tribal member and her spouse. Many of our meetings are attended by 70 – 100 tribal members. Our wellness meetings have made a tremendous impact on the lives of many of our members.

At our bi-monthly wellness meetings we have learned the following:

1. For a person to heal it's important for the person to tell their story.

This person must tell their story, when they are ready, without being judged, analyzed, commented on or questioned. It is important for those in the circle to listen with their hearts so

they can understand and help carry the burden. It is important for persons in the talking circle to then pray for the person who's story they heard.

2. To heal the truth must be told.

Native peoples must tell the truth regarding their tragic history. This history includes; slavery, murder, torture, rape, bounties, massacres, genocide and much more. In addition, Native peoples must truthfully tell of the impacts, that continue through today, that resulted from their brutal colonization. This includes loss of land, poverty, loss of identity, depression, incarceration, addiction, suicide, loss of families due to adoptions and foster care, and much more.

Not only must California Native Americans be prepared to tell their truth, but the State of California must also tell their truth if the Truth and Healing Council is to be meaningful.

3. Not only is it important for Native Americans to heal, perpetrators must also heal.

Our Tribe is not interested in participating in a truth and healing process in which the perpetrators do not recognize they need to heal as much as, if not more, than Native Americans. The State of California must, in a truthful and complete way, tell all of their past and current offenses against California Native Americans. In 2002, the California Research Bureau of the California State Library published a report titled Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians. At the time I wondered if the State of California was going to begin taking steps to tell the truth about California Native Americans and perhaps seek to rectify the injustices. Sadly, nothing happened as a result of this report. I fear the findings of the Truth and Healing Council will have the same fate.

4. To have a healthy relationship it takes two healthy parties.

To have a healthy relationship both parties must be honest, trustworthy, and honor the relationship. How can we have a healthy relationship with the state of California when it turns the missions, which were responsible for the death of nearly 100,000 of our ancestors, into tourist attractions and State Parks for monetary gain; when Sutter's Fort State Historic Park, is named after an Indian slave trader, when Fremont Peak State Park is named after John C. Fremont who is responsible for the largest one-day massacre of Indians in the United States, or when the High Speed Rail alignment will destroy seven significant village sites and fifteen years of formal consultation with the High Speed Rail Authority hasn't mattered?

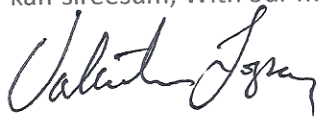
Other steps we have discussed at our Wellness Meetings to address historic trauma include the need to remove statues and symbols that honor the brutal destruction of California Native Americans. The need to change names of locations that are named after persons who committed atrocities against the California Native Americans; this includes freeways, cities, parks, schools, etc. The need to restore the traditional Native names and stories for locations that bring honor and dignity to our ancestors. Tribes must have access for gatherings, stewardship, ceremony, etc on their cultural and sacred sites that are

now on State lands. The State of California must work to protect the few remaining cultural and sacred sites from destruction by development, extraction, etc.

Finally, the experiences of federally unrecognized tribes are much different than federally recognized tribes. Our unrecognized tribe does not have a land base where our members can gather. Very few of our members can afford to live within our traditional tribal territory. We do not get any assistance for education, employment training, housing, etc. Many local governments and people feel we are not true Indians because we are federally unrecognized. It's very important that federally unrecognized tribes have equal representation on the Truth and Healing Council as the federally recognized tribes.

Finally, our Tribe request a meeting with you, Governor Newsom, so we can discuss this letter.

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