



Commissioner Marshall A. Kilgore
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Senator Gary Peters
Hart Senate Office Building, Suite 724
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Elissa Slotkin
291 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Peters and Slotkin,

I write to thank you for introducing S. 2160, the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indian Restoration Act of 2025. I also appreciate the bipartisan work alongside Congresswoman Scholten and Congressman James in advancing the companion bill in the House. This legislation represents an important opportunity to finally do what is right.

The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians have a long and well documented history in Michigan. Between 1795 and 1855, their chiefs signed five treaties that affirmed their sovereignty and their homelands. Yet today, they remain the last treaty tribe east of the Mississippi River without federal recognition. That reality is difficult to justify, especially when their history is comparable to that of the fourteen federally recognized tribes in our state. A legislative solution is the most direct and responsible way to correct this wrong.

As the Commissioner representing the most diverse ward in the City of Grand Rapids, I do not take lightly the responsibility to stand up for fairness, inclusion, and human rights. The Southside of Grand Rapids reflects many cultures, languages, and lived experiences. In a community as diverse as ours, we understand that honoring history and protecting rights is not symbolic. It is foundational. Federal recognition is about more than status. It is about affirming inherent sovereignty, upholding treaty obligations, and recognizing the basic human rights of Tribal citizens to self-determination, cultural preservation, and equal access to resources.

In 1994, Congress recognized the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, whose histories closely mirror that of the Grand River Bands. The Grand River Bands filed their notice of intent to petition in 1994 and completed their petition in 2000. More than two decades later, they are still navigating a slow and burdensome federal process. In that time, generations have gone without access to essential resources for housing, education, health services, elder care, and full participation in decisions that affect their community. Elders have passed on without seeing justice realized.

We must honor this legacy. We must respect the treaties that were signed. And we must ensure that the promises made are upheld. Supporting S. 2160 is about correcting a historical injustice and reaffirming our commitment to equity and human dignity.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue and for your continued commitment to the people of Michigan.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Marshall A. Kilgore