



May 19th, 2026

Senator Gary Peters
Hart Senate Office Building Ste. 724
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Dear Senators Peters and Slotkin,

On behalf of the leadership and congregation of Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, we write to offer our wholehearted support for the *Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians Restoration Act of 2025* and to urge its swift passage into law.

We do not come to this issue as distant observers. Fountain Street Church has been formally present in this city since 1869 but our institutional roots reach back to 1824, when the Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy imposed himself upon the Grand River watershed without the consent of its people, establishing a mission that was itself an act of colonial dispossession. The river that gave the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians their name and their home was the same river along which our predecessors planted their flag. We sit, quite literally, on land that was stolen from them. Our congregation, in its stewardship of more than two centuries of institutional memory, attests to how deeply that history of displacement is woven into the fabric of this city and into our own story. Over the course of the previous century, our Sunday morning worship and other gatherings have repeatedly acknowledged that we gather on the ancestral homeland of the Ottawa people, and we carry that acknowledgment into this letter.

The history of the Grand River Bands is long, well-documented, and marked by a pattern of broken promises. Between 1795 and 1855, Grand River Bands chiefs signed five separate treaties with the United States government, reaffirming their Constitutional sovereignty and their homelands in what is now Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon, Oceana, and Newaygo Counties. What followed those treaties — fraudulent allotment processes, the dispossession of protected reservation lands by settlers and government agents alike, and the effective erasure of the tribe's federal status through administrative neglect rather than congressional action — represents one of the most consequential injustices in the history of West Michigan. The Grand River Bands are, to this day, the last treaty tribe east of the Mississippi River without federal recognition, despite the fact that their history in Michigan is among the most thoroughly documented of any tribe in the region.

The consequences of this prolonged injustice are not merely historical. They are present and urgent. The members of the Grand River Bands who live among us as neighbors, colleagues, and fellow residents of this community are denied access to critical federal services that other federally recognized tribes receive as a matter of right: health care, housing assistance, educational support, elder care, and the full exercise of their treaty rights. They have been seeking federal acknowledgment since 1994. More than thirty years of administrative roadblocks, subcommittee inaction, and bureaucratic delay have compounded the harm done to these people over two centuries. A legislative remedy is not a gift. It is a long-overdue fulfillment of obligations the United States government has already made.

The leadership of Fountain Street Church stands in solidarity with the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. This letter is offered with the formal endorsement of our clergy, our church historians, our Governing Board, our Social Justice Committee, our Archives Committee, and others - each of which has voted to affirm this

support. We are grateful for the bipartisan work that you, together with Representatives Scholten and James, are doing to advance this legislation, and we encourage you to use every means available to ensure that it does not again languish in committee.

We respectfully ask that you keep us informed of the bill's progress and provide us with updates as the legislative process unfolds. Fountain Street Church intends to remain steadfastly engaged with this matter and will continue to follow up with your offices as long as this important work remains unfinished. We are also committed to utilizing the full scope and breadth of our public witness throughout West Michigan to publicize any action or inaction made toward this endeavor. We welcome any conversation about how our community of faith can be of further support.

With gratitude and resolve,

The Fountain Street Church Governing Board, Committees, and Minister

J. Spalding Wall, Chair
Governing Board of Fountain Street Church
by Vote of Resolution on May 18th, 2026

Beverly Boerman, Chair
FSC Social Justice Committee,
by Vote of Resolution on May 12th, 2026

Cynthia Y. Peck, Vice Chair

Matthew Riegler, Chair,
FSC Property Committee,
by Vote of Resolution on May 12th, 2026

Robert J. Dean, Jr., Treasurer

Amber Shaw, Secretary

Tony Benac
FSC Member and Historian

David Doyle, Member

Geoff Kempter, Member

Wallson Knack, Member

Ken Helmer
FSC Member and Historian

Carol S Kooistra, Member

Peter Lundeen, Member

Rev. Nathan Dannison, Minister