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June 8, 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 Sens. Peters and Slotkin,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of the Easttown Community Association to thank you for your introduction of S. 2160, *The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indian Restoration Act of 2025*, which would reaffirm federal recognition for the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians. As you know, Congresswoman Scholten and Congressman James introduced a companion bill in the House, HR 3255, with bi-partisan colleagues from the Michigan congressional delegation.

The Grand River Bands has a long and storied history in Michigan. Between 1795 and 1855, Grand River Bands chiefs signed five separate treaties reaffirming the Tribe's Constitutional sovereignty and the homelands of its people. The Grand River Bands is the last treaty tribe east of the Mississippi River without federal recognition even though its history in southwestern Michigan has been widely documented. A legislative remedy is the only way to right this wrong.

In 1994, Congress passed legislation to recognize two other Michigan Ottawa tribes – the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians – whose histories are virtually identical to that of the Grand River Bands. Grand River Bands' history is very similar to any other of the 14 tribes in Michigan already federally recognized.

The Tribe filed its notice to petition in 1994 and completed the petition for federal recognition in 2000 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Federal Acknowledgement. More than two decades later, the Tribe received a Proposed Finding in February 2023, addressing only one of the seven mandatory criteria, and the potential for federal acknowledgment is still several years away as the Tribe is forced to continue to wade through this slow, cumbersome and bureaucratic federal process. Meanwhile, generation after generation, tribal members are missing necessities they deserve, and elders are passing on without having the resources only granted to federally recognized tribes. This includes critical funding for social services, education, housing, elder care, exercising treaty rights and weighing in on legislation that impacts tribes.

Federal recognition would also allow the Grand River Bands to pursue economic development opportunities that could benefit all residents of West Michigan – and our entire state – through a variety of means that could bring hundreds of new good-paying jobs to West Michigan.

For far too long, members of the Grand River Bands have been denied their rightful status and worse, they have been deprived of important federal resources to care for their people. That is why we support righting this historical wrong with S. 2160, *The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians Restoration Act of 2025*.

Sincerely,

Stephen T. Staggs, PhD
Executive Director
Eastown Community Association
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