



## **ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS**

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SINCE 1922

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### **VIRGINIA UPHOLDING GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP WITH NATIVE NATIONS**

INDIAN COUNTRY: Virginia, a state with an abhorrent record for its historical mistreatment of Native Americans, took an important step forward yesterday to recognize the inherent sovereignty and human rights of Native Nations. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam's executed an Executive Order that affirms the Commonwealth's obligation to consult with Native Nations on environmental, historic, and cultural impacts from state permitted projects. This Order sets up a first-in-the-nation process for identifying permits that may be denied without Tribal consent.

Too often, state and federal agencies ignore the interests of Native Nations, leading to the destruction of Sacred Places and disturbance of grave sites and other cultural grounds. Governor Northam's Executive Order is the first of its kind to secure - more than just Tribal consultation, which is usually defined as a mere procedural task - and instead seek consent of Native Nations to ensure Native voices are heard, and rights are secured.

The Association on American Indian Affairs works tirelessly to protect Native American cultural sovereignty, including rights to free, prior, and informed consent to any actions that affect cultural heritage. We applaud Governor Northam for acknowledging that Native Nation consent must be part of a functional and mutually respectful government-to-government relationship.

Virginia's Native Nations, which were only federally acknowledged in the past five years, have wisely invested time and resources in re-setting their relationship with the state. Three hundred and forty-four years after the Colony of Virginia promised a government-to-government relationship with the Tribes, those Tribes are holding Virginia to its word.

Anne Richardson, Chief of the Rappahannock Tribe said, "This order affirms the Commonwealth's obligations under treaties stretching back more than 300 years; it's a major step forward."

Confirming that Tribal sovereignty is not a partisan issue, Congressman Rob Wittman (R) issued a public statement in support of Northam's (D) order, observing: "The Tribes are important partners for economic development in the Commonwealth. They are bringing medical clinics, broadband, and job opportunities. This order reflects that partnership by recognizing their voices in projects that impact them."

Marion Werkheiser, attorney at Cultural Heritage Partners and legal counsel to six of the federally recognized tribes in Virginia, told the Association that, "Beyond being the right and just thing to do, investors and developers around the world are realizing that it makes good

business sense to seek input, and ultimately consent, from Tribes that are impacted by their projects.”

Democrats and Republicans, Tribal Nations and developers, aligned in support of Indigenous human rights—Virginia just proved that securing the government-to-government relationship with Tribes is necessary and vital to protect all of its citizens! Which state will be next?

The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest Indian Country  
501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose vision is to create a world  
where diverse Native cultures are lived, protected and respected.

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