



ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS

Protecting Sovereignty ◦ Preserving Culture
Educating Youth ◦ Building Capacity

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ASSOCIATION ON AMERICAN INDIAN AFFAIRS WELCOMES THREE NEW BOARD MEMBERS FOR 2025

Native Country, Turtle Island, Friday, January 24, 2025 - The Association on American Indian Affairs is excited to begin the new year with the appointment of three distinguished leaders to its Board of Directors. Each brings unique expertise, deep connections to Native Nations, and a shared vision for empowering Native Peoples. Their leadership will help guide the Association as it continues its over 100-year commitment to protect sovereignty, preserve culture, educate youth and build capacity.

"I am deeply grateful to welcome our new board members to the Association. Their willingness to serve reflects a shared commitment to strengthening our communities and advancing our mission," said Board Member Rory Wheeler, citizen of the Seneca Nation and Chair of the Association's Nomination Committee. "The breadth of experience, knowledge, and passion they bring to the organization is truly inspiring, and I am thrilled to collaborate with them as we continue this important work together."

Jamie Gomez, a citizen of the Tlingit & Haida Tribe and Athabascan descendant, has worked for over 25 years supporting Native Nations and their citizens through national Native non-profits and now serves her Nation as its Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships and Advancement. Her journey began in college as a student representative on her Nation's council, where she helped establish the National Congress of American Indians' Youth Commission. Jamie's work has spanned initiatives including Native Vote, Census, and First Kids 1st.

Lycia Ortega, a citizen of the Ft. Yuma Quechan Indian Tribe, is a policy and communications strategist with over 17 years of experience. She focuses on building capacity and driving narrative change for Native Nations and Indigenous organizations. As Vice President of Strategic Communications for Thunderbird Strategic LLC, she combines her expertise in Indigenous Peoples Law, Communications, and Film and Video Production to enhance the political power of Indigenous Peoples and support global initiatives. Lycia's passion for storytelling and advocacy drives her work.

Makalika Nāholowa‘a, Kanaka Maoli, Native Hawaiian, is a lawyer and advocate for Indigenous Peoples. She serves as the Executive Director at the Native Hawaiian Legal Corporation, a nonprofit law firm dedicated to Native Hawaiian rights for 50 years. Makalika is the Immediate Past President of the National Native American Bar Association and has held numerous leadership roles with organizations such as the American Bar Association, the Hawaii Access to Justice Commission, and the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement. Her professional journey includes roles at Microsoft Corporation, Perkins Coie LLP, and extensive board service. She holds a J.D. from Columbia Law School and a B.S. in Mathematics with a concentration in Computer Science from Arizona State University.

The Association’s three new Board of Directors members were appointed during the Association’s Fall meeting to fill open positions. The Association’s membership will fully appoint Jamie, Lycia and Makalika at its 103rd Annual Membership meeting in December 2025. The Association on American Indian Affairs looks forward to the contributions of these exceptional Native women leaders. Together, they will help the organization continue to create a world where diverse Native cultures and values are lived, protected, and respected.

For more information about the Association and its initiatives, please visit Indian-Affairs.org.

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The Association on American Indian Affairs is the oldest non-profit serving Native Country protecting sovereignty, preserving culture, educating youth, and building capacity. The Association was formed in 1922 to change the destructive path of federal policy from assimilation, termination and allotment, to sovereignty, self-determination and self-sufficiency. Throughout its over 100-year history, the Association has provided national advocacy on watershed issues that support sovereignty and culture, while working at a grassroots level with Native Nations to support the implementation of programs that support Native Peoples.

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