

May 5th, 2025

Department of the Interior
Office of the Assistant Secretary- Indian Affairs
ATTN: Office of Federal Acknowledgement
1849 C Street, NW.
Washington, D.C. 202401

Dear Assistant Secretary,

I am writing to submit a public comment regarding registered petition #408: Mattaponi Indian Tribe and Reservation.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Tonda Lovelace, and I am the great-great-granddaughter of the last legitimate chief of the Mattaponi Tribe, Ellston (Elston) Major. I am a direct descendant of the historic Major family and a proud member of the Mattaponi people.

From a young age, I was told by my grandmother that I was "Indian"—a truth that shaped my identity long before I understood any other part of who I was. The name "Mattaponi" echoed throughout my childhood, and I grew up hearing stories of how our family—the Majors—were forced to leave from our ancestral homes on the reservation.

As I grew older, I began researching my heritage in depth. I was astonished to discover how deeply the Major family is woven into documented Mattaponi history—appearing in books, articles, and photographs. One poignant discovery was a letter written by my great-great-grandfather to the Commonwealth of Virginia, pleading for assistance when non-Native individuals began occupying reservation lands. Sadly, no help ever came.

Another heartbreaking finding was my great-uncle Powhatan's death certificate, which listed drowning as the cause of death. That detail filled me with dread and fear for the safety of my family—our story felt like one of erasure and exclusion.

Motivated by a desire to reclaim our rightful place and honor my ancestors, I applied for tribal membership in 2018. I followed the tribe's request to engage in community events and shared my participation in pow-wows and other cultural gatherings. I even began attending church on the reservation and enrolled in cultural classes. However, despite my deep involvement, my application was repeatedly delayed with vague explanations.

To my dismay, I was told by some tribal members that my application was being stalled due to the color of my skin—that I was "too dark." This discrimination has been deeply painful, especially because my brother Charley, who also sought membership, passed away before he could be approved.

In March 2021, I was finally issued a tribal ID card. However, I was informed that the council had been "forced" to approve my membership, which left me uncertain whether I was truly accepted into the

tribe or merely placated. This feeling is intensified by knowledge that my uncle [REDACTED] was denied proper enrollment.

It is my understanding that a new tribal roll was created for the federal recognition petition, only listing my great-uncle Powhatan—because he did not have any children. Removing a chief from the roll and erasing his lineage is deeply disrespectful to both past and present members of the Mattaponi Tribe.

Therefore, I respectfully request that this petition be paused until the Mattaponi Tribe is unified and all historic direct descendants are recognized and restored to the tribal roll with full membership and voting rights.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Tonda Lovelace