

March 6, 2025

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DOI/OS/AS-IA/OFA
Washington, DC

Department of the Interior
Office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs
Attn: Office of Federal Acknowledgment
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Opposition to Mattaponi Indian Tribe and Reservation

Greetings,

Taken from the Mattaponi tribe website (<https://mattaponi.gov/>) and specifically the page on enrollment (<https://mattaponi.gov/tribal-enrollment>) the last bullet has the following as part of their application process.

“Membership Dues / Taxes: Members may pay their annual dues (off reservation) or taxes (on reservation) at the same time as they submit their enrollment documents. Payment is required to access certain rights or privileges associated with tribal membership, as outlined in the Constitution.”

As an enrolled member of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes (Wichita, Waco, Keechi, & Tawakoni) through my late father, and a Muscogee (Creek) descendant through my late mother, I take great offense to this statement of “membership dues”.

Being a Tribal citizen is not something that one pays for, or what can be taken away on a whim for lack of payment, thus excluding “certain rights or privileges associated with tribal membership”. It is not a club where we dress up and give ourselves names such as: Falling Star, Wise Spirit, Wind Walker, Thundercloud, etc., (<https://www.vpm.org/news/2022-04-05/after-a-year-of-public-feuding-mattaponi-tribal-conflict-comes-to-a-head>) nor is it an exclusive family club where the leadership is, seemingly, all closely related (7 of the 9 Mattaponi Council members have the surname Custalow).

Given your Office, I would not dare make the assumption that you do not know the history of our Tribal Nations. With such knowledge, you could likely teach me the historical context of what Tribal populations have endured nationwide. I can only speak to what I know, and what I believe. While my heart goes out to those Tribal Nations that lost their recognition, or were never recognized, I know that charging an annual “membership due” for enrollment is a bastardization of Tribal Nations everywhere and brings to mind the practice of “Wannabees” and “Pretendians”. This, in addition to very minor (20 min) online

research which produced the other issues mentioned above, caused me concern and the reason for this opposition piece to be submitted. Other, non-related, research in preparation for a lecture is where I came across the petition and opportunity for comment.

Ultimately, the decision is yours and will be respected. I only wanted to state my personal thoughts and do my part to provide a collective voice to those that are unaware of the petition. With all honesty I cannot think of a single circumstance where a membership due would ever arise with any of the Tribes I have had the honor of working with. That alone causes me to believe that perhaps the Mattaponi were a success story of the assimilation era.

So:ti:c?a/Mvto/Thank You,

Be well-



Lancer Stephens, PhD, MBA, MS (Wichita/Creek)
Wichita Tribe Health Board Vice Chair
Absentee Shawnee Tribe Health Board Secretary
Associate Dean/Associate Professor, Presidential Professor
College of Public Health
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences