

Housing Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7110

AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR HOUSING TO STATE-RECOGNIZED TRIBES, REQUIRING EACH TRIBE TO CONDUCT A STUDY AND CREATE A REPORT AND CONCERNING THE CARE AND MANAGEMENT OF

Title: RESERVATION LANDS AND TRIBAL FUNDS.

Vote Date: 3/6/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/4/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Housing Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill will allocate \$1 million to each of the five state recognized tribes to conduct a survey of the lands they own. These studies will be conducted to determine their potential for residential development. While these tribes are usually the purview of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, they asked the Department of Housing to oversee the financial disbursement and the study itself.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Jelani Fletcher, Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation](#) – Jelani Fletcher testified in person before the committee in support of this bill. Fletcher stated the bill is important to all tribal nations in Connecticut as it allows them to be able to create and mend their relationship with the state moving forward and will create opportunities for their people. Fletcher added that their relationship with the state is supposed to be a direct one, and not through intermediaries like the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) or the Department of Welfare.

[Cassandra Keola, Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation](#) – Cassandra Keola testified in person before the committee in support of this bill. Keola recalled the many challenges state recognized tribes had when trying to build a relationship with the state government, so the bill's passage would symbolize that tribes can access state services and resources. Keola added this bill would also open valuable community relationships within the tribe and its surrounding areas. Keola argued that with this bill, Connecticut will advocate for its native communities, and move towards cooperation which will help current and future generations. Keola also supported surveying the land to see how sustainable it is and noted that their tribe has acreage in Colchester and Trumbull that is sustainable.

[Brenda Geer, Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation, Vice Chairwoman](#) – Brenda Geer testified in person before the committee in support of this bill. Geer recounted how native people were displaced, disenfranchised, and denied the basic right to live on the land of their ancestors for centuries, and today, many tribal members find themselves unable to return to their homelands due to a lack of housing infrastructure and economic opportunities. Geer stated passing this bill is the first step in rectifying these injustices and setting the foundation for meaningful conversations about the native sovereignty, housing access, and systemic barriers keeping tribal members away from their rightful home. Geer added the study proposed in this bill is about people who deserve the dignity of returning to the land that holds their rich history, culture, traditions, and spirit, it is not just about numbers and data. They noted that the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) should not have control over their land, because historically, DEEP has not kept their statutory responsibility to the tribes of Connecticut, such as the notification of grants, clean running water, suitable housing, and other forms of support.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Richard Velky, Chief, Schaghticoke Tribal Nation](#) – Richard Velky opposed this bill and stated that while they appreciate the state's interest in providing funds for the development of housing on reservation lands, the bill as drafted does nothing to help the tribes. Velky stated the bill instead, "reverses the hands of time and works to strip the tribes of their sovereignty," adding that over the centuries, the state of Connecticut wrongfully took and never paid for their tribal lands, "which once consisted of more than 2,500 acres and now has been dwindled down to 400 acres of mountainous terrain." This history makes them wary of any legislation that impacts Native American Tribal land. Velky added that this proposed legislation does not mention which tribes would be impacted by the measures, and the scope of the work required, would likely cost more than the offered \$1 million, ultimately resulting in "not a single home" being built with the funding. Velky shared their concern with the legislation giving authority to an Indian Affairs Council, which is not established, nor its membership determined, and stated that there is not enough time to address these concerns before the proposal is set to go into effect. Velky urged that the legislation be turned into a study that includes tribal members.

**Reported by: Arianna Tsikitas, Clerk
Jasmine Jones, Assistant Clerk**

Date: 3/31/2025