



## USET Sovereignty Protection Fund, Inc.

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July 5, 2016

Senator Martin Heinrich  
303 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Support for Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act of 2016

Dear Senator Heinrich,

On behalf of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund, Inc. (USET SPF), we write to state our strong support for the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act of 2016. USET SPF is an inter-tribal organization representing 26 federally recognized Tribes from Texas across to Florida and up to Maine<sup>1</sup>. As we seek to advance and protect the sovereignty of our member Tribal Nations, we see the protection of our cultural objects as essential to our cultural survival.

As you are aware, USET SPF Tribal Nations and Tribal Nations across the country face the grave violation of our cultural objects being obtained through illegal means and sold, both internationally and domestically. While current federal law aims to protect items of cultural patrimony, it remains insufficient to fully deter their removal, export, and sale. These sacred objects, which often include human remains, must be returned to their people. Our relatives cannot rest until their safe passage into the spirit world is secured by proper reinterment in our homelands.

The STOP Act of 2016 makes changes to existing federal law that strengthen the ability of Tribal Nations to protect their important cultural objects. The increased penalties, explicit prohibition on exportation, and limited immunity for those voluntarily repatriating items serve to both keep cultural objects with Tribal Nations, where they belong, and facilitate the return of those that have left Tribal possession. The Act also calls on the federal government, with the help of a Tribal working group, to conduct studies designed to protect Native American cultural objects.

USET SPF believes that stronger penalties will deter illegal conduct and even lead to a dialogue with the holders of these cultural objects that will enable their safe return home. The ability of Tribal Nations to rebuild and create a healthy future depends, in large part, on how we are able to understand our respective

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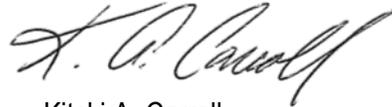
<sup>1</sup> USET member Tribes include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians (ME), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (ME), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (LA), Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe (CT), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida (FL), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Narragansett Indian Tribe (RI), Oneida Indian Nation (NY), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township (ME), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point (ME), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Poarch Band of Creek Indians (AL), Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (NY), Seminole Tribe of Florida (FL), Seneca Nation of Indians (NY), Shinnecock Indian Nation (NY), Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (LA), and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

pasts. Our cultural and sacred items provide a vital link to our history, our ceremonies, and our way of life. The time has come for the United States government, in accordance with Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to take greater steps to ensure their return and protection. With this in mind, USET SPF extends its full support to the STOP Act, and calls upon Congress for its immediate passage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Patterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brian" being more prominent than the last name "Patterson".

Brian Patterson  
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kitcki A. Carroll". The signature is cursive and elegant, with the first name "Kitcki" and last name "Carroll" being clearly legible.

Kitcki A. Carroll  
Executive Director

*“Because there is strength in Unity”*