

LAUNCHING THE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROJECT

Whether you've been reading the *ACLU News* for decades or for only a couple of years, you've heard about our partnership with North Coast tribes. This year, we're taking new strides forward. Working with the Northern California Indian Development Council (NCIDC), made up of 13 Tribes and Tribally affiliated organizations, we are launching the Indigenous Education Advocacy Project. The ACLU-NC will provide legal and policy support and work alongside NCIDC for systems and policy change, and is committed to helping NCIDC to raise funds for the new Indigenous Education Advocate position, which will work to educate and empower native students, families, and communities to advocate for their rights in the public school system.

INTRODUCING RAIN MARSHALL, INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVOCATE

Rain was interviewed by Tedde Simon, Acting Indigenous Justice Program Manager at the ACLU of Northern California

RAIN, TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND

I was born in Arcata, where Humboldt State University is located. I'm the product of the Indian Relocation Program—my mom is from Oklahoma, and my dad is from South Dakota. They were sent to California, and they met at Humboldt State University. I'm enrolled in the Yankton Sioux Tribe, *Ihanktonwan*. Thanks to my parents, I have those deep roots. I'm a Tribal citizen. I participate in my tribal cultural activities, and I'm learning my language and teaching my two daughters about their Tribes. I went to law school in South Dakota, and lived and worked on the reservation, and taught at the community college.

Growing up in Humboldt County, I attended the local Yurok, Hupa, Wiyot, Tolowa, and Karuk ceremonies—the Brush Dance, the Jump Dance, the White Deer Skin Dance. I feel very lucky to be culturally connected to these people here, and to know their ways of life and their worldviews and their knowledge.

I've been teaching in various Tribal Universities and Community Colleges since 2004, in Native American studies and Indian Education. I bring that knowledge to this position in terms of curriculum, educational materials, and my legal background, which will help with advocacy and access to knowledge and resources.

WHAT EXCITES YOU MOST ABOUT THE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION ADVOCACY PROJECT?

Because I have a background in education and academia, and I'm a tribal member, I am passionate about helping to alleviate inequities in education, empowering tribal communities to have the resources they need to be their own advocates, and have a better reflection of Indigenous cultural identity in schools in the area. I am excited to do the advocacy that's necessary for all of our Indigenous youth to have a quality and meaningful education that reinforces their identity and their self-worth, and who they are as Indigenous people.

HOW HAS COVID IMPACTED NATIVE STUDENTS, AND WHAT'S YOUR RESPONSE?

Indigenous education has had a long tragic history of forced removals from loving homes to placement in harsh Indian boarding schools where various forms of abuse took place which led

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to intergenerational trauma. Today, Indigenous children face erasure in school textbooks, perpetuation of false narratives, low graduation numbers, and high suicide rates. They often suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety due to this trauma. In addition, Indigenous families often live below the poverty line and have difficulty accessing basic necessities, and they face food insecurity and difficult access to wifi and computers. In this new online learning environment, it is this population that will be at a disadvantage and we are advocating for the proper usage of the Title VI and VII (Impact Aid) funds from Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to help these families get access to the resources they need for technological assistance, mental health resources, and fair educational opportunities.


Also, we are advocating that in this new virtual environment, there will not be a deficiency in providing for the delivery of services for Indigenous students who have disabilities in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Assistance Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act for Indigenous students.

WHY A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE ACLU AND NCIDC?

The ACLU has a historical legacy of fighting for—and winning—many rights in the U.S. Partnering with NCIDC creates a strong bridge to local tribes and communities that have historically not had a voice in the educational system. NCIDC's mission and goals of serving and educating local youth and providing services presents a great opportunity for the ACLU to work in partnership with that knowledge and those relationships.



WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT HUMBOLDT AND DEL NORTE COUNTIES?

I live in Wiyot territory. I have seen the Wiyot Tribe go from a very small Tribe, who commemorated the massacre that nearly erased their people by candlelight vigil, to a Tribe with its own strong cultural revitalization program today. And they've claimed their land back. Part of it was given back to the Tribe after years of advocacy and education with the City of Eureka, and part of the land they bought. They had to rehabilitate it, remove battery acids and other toxins. And after 154 years, since the time of the Indian Island Massacre, they brought back their World Renewal Ceremony. For me to have seen that in my lifetime is very inspiring. It shows strength, resiliency and perseverance. I have Wiyot students in my classroom today! 

WHAT CAN ACLU MEMBERS DO TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS JUSTICE?

Uplift local Tribes. You can support Tribes in your area, whenever they are raising awareness about issues of inequity and injustice, of human rights violations and discrimination that has been so persistent in California and throughout the nation. Non-Indigenous people have a lot to learn from Indigenous people, especially during this time of climate change. You can be an advocate for incorporating Indigenous value systems into education. Tribes have deep knowledge about that going back thousands of years, that teachers and schools can utilize, and that will benefit everyone.