

fellowship in recognition of my efforts in reclaiming the Wampanoag language.¹ I am a teacher of the Wampanoag language and since 2014, I have sat as an appointed Commissioner on the Commission on Language Learning, created by The American Academy of Arts and Sciences in response to a bipartisan request from Congress to study the nation's language education needs.² Our people are direct descendants of the first Indian nation to reach out a hand to help the Pilgrims in 1620. My blood and bones come from the very land that you know as Mashpee. When I die, just like my ancestors, my body will return to the land, very literally returning home to join the bones of my Ancestors. This is the Mashpee way.

Chairman Hoeven and Vice Chairman Udall, and Honorable Members of the Committee, on behalf of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe I thank you for holding this hearing and for the focus you are bringing to the preservation of Native languages. We appreciate that you understand that our language is inextricably intertwined with our culture, our history, and our sovereignty. We know you understand that the story of the Mashpee Wampanoag is an integral part of the story of the United States, and that the preservation of our language is important not just to us, but to the preservation of the collective history of all Americans.

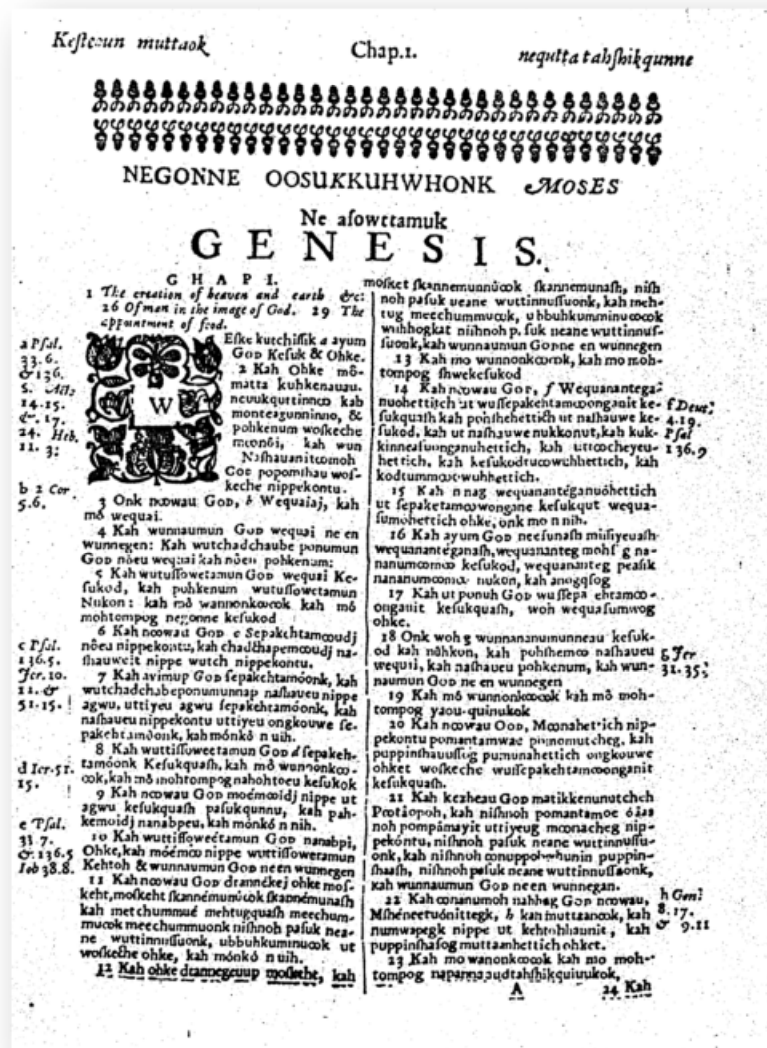
¹ "Jessie Little Doe Baird is a linguist who is reviving a long-silent language and restoring to her Native American community a vital sense of its cultural heritage ... Through painstaking research, dedicated teaching, and contributions to other groups struggling with language preservation, Baird is reclaiming the rich linguistic traditions of indigenous peoples and preserving precious links to our nation's complex past." MacArthur Foundation website: <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/24/>

² In 2014, a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators and Representatives requested that the American Academy of Arts and Sciences undertake a study of the nation's language education needs to answer two questions:

- How does language learning influence economic growth, cultural diplomacy, the productivity of future generations, and the fulfillment of all Americans?
- What actions should the nation take to ensure excellence in all languages as well as international education and research, including how we may more effectively use current resources to advance language attainment?

In response, the Academy created the Commission on Language Learning. The Commission's final report, entitled *America's Languages: Investing in Language Learning for the 21st Century*, provides recommendations to "improve access to as many languages as possible, for people of every age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background." American Academy of Arts and Sciences website: <https://www.amacad.org/content/Research/researchproject.aspx?d=21896>

The Wampanoag was the first Indian nation to adopt an alphabetic writing system in 1632. The first bible printed in the New World was printed in the Wampanoag language in 1663.



The largest corpus of Native Written documents in North America are written in Wampanoag. Yet after relentless pressure from non-Indian settlement of our aboriginal lands and the pressure that came with it to interact with the non-Indian community around us in English, including assimilation efforts such as the Carlisle Indian Boarding School, we

were robbed of the ability to speak our own language. For six generations we could not introduce ourselves, or speak to our ancestors, in our own language.

But today, seven generations later, we have used those written tools left by our Ancestors to heal this wound, as we are the first American Indians to have reclaimed a language with no living speakers. We started in 1993 when we created a long-term strategic plan that culminated in the establishment of the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project. I initially worked with linguists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to begin the recovery of the language, learning from the Wampanoag bible and other historical Native Wampanoag written documents, and drawing on correspondence with other related Algonquian languages and linguistic principles to fill in the gaps. As I reclaimed my own language, I began to work with other Wampanoag citizens to teach them the language as well. After 24 years of planning and hard work, we have succeeded in recovering our language - we are the first to reclaim a language with no living speakers. In the process, we created the only inter-tribal cooperative project for the tribes of the Wampanoag. We have trained and produced two credentialed Wampanoag linguists, and we have over fifteen certified language teachers. We are developing a dictionary that currently includes over 12,000 entries, and a curriculum for second language acquisition of adult learners. We have a three-week summer youth program for ages 5 to 13, and schools that teach our children in Wampanoag. We have a family immersion language camp, and community language classes that are currently held in Mashpee, Aquinnah, Plymouth, and Boston.

The Wampanoag Nation and Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project could not have accomplished these things without vital partnerships with the Federal Government. The Administration for Native American language funding and the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Protection Act funding have made possible our ability to develop a core team of fluent speakers and certified teachers who in turn have developed curriculum for a myriad of language programs and services to meet the needs of our Nation. Continued funding for these programs is absolutely crucial the preservation of first American languages that are at risk.

I want to underscore that the federal government also played a crucial role in helping us preserve our language when in 2015 it set aside a federally-protected reservation on which we are able to engage in true self-determination. Having a reservation allows us to provide a school setting under tribal law that provides appropriate culturally-based education for our children. Here, Wampanoag children are able to attend a tribally-run pre-school and kindergarten where our students are taught in the Wampanoag language and by means of curriculum and teacher certification as determined by the tribe rather than the State. This year we will be adding a first grade class. This level of language instruction would be nearly impossible in an off-reservation public school environment and we are praying that our lands remain in trust in order to continue this work.

The interconnectedness of our language and our land is even more fundamentally explained by our word "nutahkeem", which loosely translated means 'my land', but is better understood as "my land that is not separate from my body". In our language, there is no other way to express, 'my land'. Another of our words -- "nupunuhshâm" means both 'I have fallen down', and, 'I have lost my land rights', that my feet (part of my body/which is also my lands) have been removed from me. Our land and our language are inextricably tied to one another, and to our ultimate survival as a people.

When we teach in our language, we honor all of our Mothers and Fathers who came before us. We also are the Mothers and Fathers who are making a way forward for our own children. We are providing them with the tools to live a productive and satisfying Wampanoag life. Federal programs are absolutely vital to the protection of Native American languages, the initiatives they fund are the seeds than can be grown to mightier vines with some additional efforts.

We know there is a correlation between language immersion teaching and positive outcomes in graduation rates, higher education, and protective social factors against addiction, depression, and suicide. There are so many ways that the federal government, our trustee, can help us improve and advance the vitally important work of language protection. In particular, I would like to recommend several initiatives:

- ***Provide continuation funding as an extension of ANA and Esther Martinez funding pools.*** Those tribes who demonstrate effective work to their program funding officers should be able to continue the work. Especially for small tribes that lack robust economic development opportunities, outside funding is key to continuing the hard work of language staff. For example, the current ANA language funding cycle is no longer than three years. Without continuation funding, the work is likely to halt.
- ***Provide speaker pipeline funding for language programs.*** If we are to continue to grow our investment in a speaker population from K-12, we need fluent speaking teachers. I can tell you from my own work, this happens when a Master and Apprentice model is employed, where a fluent speaker spends a minimum of 25 hours per week with an apprentice speaker in an immersed language setting. This schedule yields a speaker that is at least an intermediate high speaker on the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) scale. These speakers then become our certified instructors and are able to deliver core subject curriculum in the target language. Immersion schools can then reliably add grades with trained, fluent speakers.
- ***Fund cooperative relationships between Local Education Authorities and Tribal Education Authorities where language is concerned.*** The local school is one of the most effective tools to be leveraged as a partner in Native language maintenance and growth. Within a given local district, the expert speakers of local languages could enter the school system as tribally certified experts. This would ensure that youth are being provided with the best possible language instructors. This is exactly the case for my language where we have partnered with the local Mashpee School District and our language project staff provides tribally certified language instructors. Students in the Mashpee High School may take Wôpanâô8âôk to meet their world language requirement. Tribes need to be supported financially in these partnerships.

- ***Encourage both SAMHSA and the Indian Health Service to incorporate Mother languages into their toolboxes as evidence-based treatment tools.*** We are currently facing a massive opioid epidemic that is wreaking havoc on Native Community populations, both at the youth and adult level, as well as extremely high rates of suicide and alcoholism. Since we know that traditional ceremony and language provide strong protective factors against suicide, drug use, and alcoholism, and that language is being incorporated in Tribal Action Plans to address these issues across Indian Country, language must be incorporated into our treatment methodology paradigm and designated as an evidence-based tool in order to qualify for funding under many prevention and treatment grant opportunities.
- ***Leverage a pool of resource dollars from the Administration for Children and Families current Child Care Development Fund.*** A portion of the current program budgets to tribes could create immersion childcare nests with little additional effort on the part of the government and ensure that a wider number of babies have the advantage of heritage language as early as possible.
- ***Encourage tribes to exercise the sovereignty provided by their trust lands.*** Congress should provide funding to assist Tribes in developing their own immersion teacher certification processes and cover curriculum development staff in order to provide on-reservation immersion schools.
- ***Empower national American Indian Language experts.*** With your support and leadership, we could easily act to leverage national American Indian Language experts to create a national online curriculum clearing house organized by language family. This would be an invaluable resource of curriculum tools available to language teachers for all Native American Languages.
- ***Provide federal legislation giving tribes the right to develop tribal educational materials for tribe-state education plans.*** While States have the latitude to create tribe-state education plans, States have the ultimate authority over whether they enter

into these plans, the tribes they consult, and what the plans look like. Federal dollars that require the Tribe to be the lead in crafting the tribal service portion of these plans makes good sense and would leverage both state education dollars that come from the federal budget as well as local education resources.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and for your interest in the protection of Native languages. The story of America and how we became who we are today as one great Nation is a story woven from many different peoples and many different languages, all critical to our understanding of who we are. The study and preservation of our language is a critical thread, as important to the preservation and understanding of the fabric of American history as any other. And of course for us the preservation of our language ultimately is the key to preservation of ourselves. With our language, we are once again able to properly introduce ourselves to our Ancestors when we pass from this world into the next.