

This legislative session has been one of the most productive in years



Boozhoo! This legislative session has been one of the most productive in years, with significant bills decades in the making have made it to Governor Tim Walz's desk to be signed into law. I am especially grateful for the work of the Native Legislative Caucus – Senator Mary Kunesh, Representative Jamie Becker-Finn, Representative Heather Keeler, and Representative Alicia Kozlowski – as they continue to show up and make sure Native voices are heard in the legislature.

As we head toward the close of session at the end of May, I am so proud of what we have already accomplished this year. To date, the Governor and I, along with our partners in the legislature, have worked hard to make progress on the issues that matter most, including:

- Strengthening protections for Native American children and families, affirming the authority of all federally recognized Indian tribes to handle cases of Indian child custody and child placement proceedings, and requiring social workers to make active efforts to preserve family unity, regardless of what occurs with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- Providing free school breakfast and lunch for all Minnesota students at participating schools. This bill ensures that no student will have to learn on an empty stomach. As a child whose family utilized free-and-reduced price lunch, it was incredibly meaningful to join legislators, students, and advocates at Webster Elementary as Governor Walz signed this bill into law.
- Providing \$50 million in homelessness prevention and assistance through the Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance program, which provides financial assistance and support services to people and households that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The law also allows for qualified households to receive more than 24 months of direct rental assistance.
- Protecting reproductive freedom through the Protect Reproductive Options (PRO) Act, which establishes that every Minnesotan has a fundamental right to make decisions about their own reproductive health, including the right to use or refuse reproductive health care, to continue a pregnancy and give birth, and to obtain an abortion.
- Restoring voting rights to 55,000 Minnesotans, the largest expansion of voting rights in Minnesota in the last half century. Governor Walz and I were joined by legislators, faith, labor, and community advocates

to celebrate the bill signing that restored voting rights for over 55,000 formerly incarcerated people in Minnesota. According to 2018 estimates, nine percent of Native Americans living in Minnesota are ineligible to vote due to felonies. This will help shrink that number drastically.

- Protecting access to gender affirming health care through an executive order signed by Governor Walz. Gender affirming health care services refers to all medical, surgical, counseling, or referral services, including telehealth services, that an individual may receive to support and affirm that individual's gender identity or gender expression.

- Banning hair discrimination through the CROWN Act, which explicitly prohibits racial discrimination based on natural hair texture and hair styles such as braids, locs, and twists.

- Providing \$5 million in emergency funding for food shelves.

- Establishing a Minnesota carbon-free electricity standard and moving Minnesota to 100 percent clean energy by 2040. The law ensures Minnesota will take steps to lower greenhouse gas emissions, combat the climate crisis, and create new clean energy jobs.

- Protecting Minnesotans from catalytic converter theft by only allowing registered scrap metal dealers to purchase catalytic converters, increasing criminal penalties for the illegal possession or sale of catalytic converters, and requiring catalytic converters to carry the vehicle identification number of the car it originated from.

Governor Walz and I have also made over 200

appointments to state boards, commissions, councils, and task forces, appointed eight judges, and hired the state's first Chief Equity Officer.

When we invest in the success of Native children, families, and communities, we are building a stronger and brighter future for all people in Minnesota. In addition to these legislative accomplishments, Governor Walz and I continue to work toward making Minnesota a state where every child thrives. Our budget proposal includes historic investments in education, child care, health and safety, and Minnesota's economic future. If passed, the One Minnesota Budget will lower costs for families, reduce childhood poverty by 25 percent, cut taxes, invest in local communities and projects, reduce gun violence, combat the opioid crisis, increase access to safe and stable housing, and more.

We also continue to work with our partners in the legislature to get critical investments across the finish line, such as cash equity bonding to support capital projects across the state, Native language revitalization grants, the American Indian Scholars Program, and expansions to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives Office and the Office of American Indian Health. As we draw closer to the end of the legislative session, it becomes more important than ever for the voices of all people in Minnesota to be heard at the State Capitol. I highly encourage everyone to reach out to their elected officials about the things that matter most to you, your families, and your communities.

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