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Testimony on Assembly Bill 959
Assembly Committee on Transportation
Thursday, February 10, 2022

Chairman Plumer and members,

Thank you for the opportunity to come before your committee today to discuss Assembly Bill 959, which would allow for the Oneida Nation to erect Purple Heart signs within the Nation's reservation and on state highways.

Wisconsin is home to over 17,000 Oneida tribal members, of whom nearly 8,000 live on the reservation or in the Northeastern part of the state. The Oneida reservation, located in Brown and Outagamie Counties, totals 65,400 acres to which 23,122 acres are tribally owned. Recently, it was brought to my attention that the Oneida Nation would like to erect Purple Heart Reservation signs that would recognize the service and sacrifice made by combat wounded veterans. In fact, the Oneida nation passed a Government Resolution in 2019 proclaiming the Oneida Nation a Purple Heart Reservation.

However, discussions with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) and research into the issue have identified some barriers that would require state statute changes. Currently, the DOT dual language signing program does not allow the department the ability to install the Purple Heart Reservation signs due to the following:

- WI State Statute 86.19 (highway signs, regulation, and prohibition) only allows for signing on the right-of-way that guides, warns or regulates motorists.
- Federal regulations also require all roadways open to public travel to follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. Section 1A.01 of the 2009 MUTCD indicates that traffic control devices or their supports shall not bear any advertising message or any other message that is not related to traffic control.

The Purple Heart is a United States military medal awarded in the name of the President of the United States to those wounded or killed while serving their country in wartime. Numerous Oneida Nation Warriors have distinguished themselves in combat across the ages fighting to protect both the Oneida Nation and the United States of America. Allowing the Oneida Nation to place these signs are a public and civic way to recognize Purple Heart recipients and to help bring awareness to veterans who have selflessly served.

Chairman Plumer, again, I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee on this important legislation. At this time, I'd be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the committee may have.



Testimony of Councilwoman Marie Summers before the Assembly Transportation Committee Re: Assembly Bill 959 Thursday, February 10, 2022

Shekoli, Good afternoon Members of the Transportation Committee. I am Marie Summers and I am here representing the Oneida Nation in my official capacity as an elected Councilmember. It is with great honor that I stand before you to request the Transportation Committee to support the passage of Assembly Bill 959 that will allow the Oneida Nation to erect Purple Heart signs on state highways within the Nation's reservation.

Our Nation's history has been that our Oneida warriors have fought to defend our land and our people for time immemorial. Our warriors also aided during the birth of the United States. During the Revolutionary War, our Oneida ancestors provided aid to George Washington and his starving army at Valley Forge. At that time, the war was not going well for the Americans as the British had captured Philadelphia, the first Capital to the Rebels and home to the Continental Congress. After Congress escaped, Washington and his troops made their winter camp at Valley Forge. The winter conditions worsened on the weary army and the army's supply system was stifled, and it was difficult to get the necessary goods to the soldiers. The soldiers were starving and had inadequate supplies and clothing, and it was told that soldier's feet were bleeding from freezing inside of their boots. Oneidas, including Chief Shenanadoah who was an unwavering friend to the Americans, traveled over 200 miles from Fort Stanwix to Valley Forge to provide several hundreds of bushels of corn to feed and save the army. It is believed that this historical event had a significant impact on the outcome of the war, and ultimately the birth of the United States. Ever since, our Oneida warriors have served, and continue to serve, in every war on the side of the United States, with several of our veterans receiving the Purple Heart.

In 2019, the Wisconsin State Military Order of Purple Heart Chapter 164, led by two of our cherished Purple Heart recipients, the late George Greendeer Sr. and Cletus Ninham, worked with the Nation's leadership and veteran's groups to declare the Oneida Reservation a Purple Heart Reservation. Subsequently, a community event was held by the Military Order of Purple Heart to erect a monument honoring our veterans and recognizing Oneida purple heart recipients.

be dropped approximately 15-20 feet, which was as high as a tree top. The high winds prohibited a safe pick up and return to the ground after the attempted airlift take off.

A makeshift shelter was made of ponchos strung up around Cletus to keep out the wind and rain. Cletus laid under those ponchos, without any pain relievers, knowing he was close to death. A combat medic cared for Cletus until a landing zone was cleared the next day to airlift him to receive the necessary surgeries and medical care. Cletus spent about a month in recovery before being shipped back to his unit at Phan Ran (pronounced FAN RAN). He was sent back to the front lines at Dak To (pronounced DAK TAO) because the 327th unit was being overrun by Viet Cong (pronounced VEE IT KONG). Cletus spent about another month in the country between the front lines and the base camp, before returning back to the United States.

Like every other service man, Cletus took leave before reporting to his state side duty assignment; however, a few days after returning home he was shipped off to the Milwaukee VA Medical Hospital for approximately one month because his legs started to swell and turn bright red. The military labeled him as AWOL (Absent With Out Leave) not knowing he was at the VA hospital being treated for the injuries sustained from Vietnam. Eventually, Cletus made it to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. He was issued a uniform upon return and he concluded the remainder of his two-year tour of duty. Today, Cletus continues to serve his fellow comrades as the Oneida VFW Post Commander. He proudly represents the Oneida Nation and the United State of America, as a military veteran and recipient of the Purple Heart.

This is one story of one man's life in the military. The Military Order of Purple Heart Chapter 164's commanders wanted to be sure that all Oneida Nation veterans who served and received a Purple Heart were recognized for their service, be honored for their sacrifice, and their stories are kept alive.

The Oneida Nation is proud of our military service, as Oneida people have served in every war on the side of the United States since the Revolutionary War. We hold our veterans in the highest regard, and it is with the utmost honor and respect that I am able to come forward and present this testimony to the Transportation Committee on behalf of those who have sacrificed their lives to defend our Nations. On behalf of the Oneida Nation, I ask the Committee to continue to support our efforts to honor and recognize our Purple Heart veterans by voting to support the passage of Assembly Bill 959.

Yaw^ko

A good mind. A good heart. A strong fire.



Pl^o. To the General Court of Mass^{ts}: Bay
 June Cambridge Mass^{ts} 15. 1775

The Indian who accompanied Mr. Mather and
 is an Onondaga Chief of considerable Rank in his own Country
 He has come on a Visit to the Camp principally to satisfy
 his Curiosity; But as his Talk has been very friendly to the
 United Colonies and his Report to his Nation at his Return
 have important Implications to the publick Interest; I have
 thought necessary to make his Visit agreeable.

Having express'd an Inclination to pay his
 Regards to the General Court, I thought it proper to let them
 know who he was and upon what Branch he came; Not
 doubting, but your Honorable Board will join with me
 in showing him all proper civilities. I have desired a
 Journal to be kept of his Visit at his Return.

Your Obedt^o with great Respect & Regard

Your most Obedt^o Servant

G^o Washington

The Hon^{ble} Senate
 by Mr. Shaker pa.



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One of the earliest mentions of the Onedea in George Washington's correspondence. Washington writes the Massachusetts General Court, introducing an Onedea Chief who has arrived at the Continental army encampment in Cambridge, September 28th, 1775.

Washington, George *Washington Papers, Series 3, Varior Transcripts, 1775 to 1785, Subseries 3C, Civil Officials and Private Citizens, Letterbook 1, 1775, Library of Congress.*

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