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Public Testimony at the Hearing for HB331 (Draft Bill LC2004)

BEFORE:

**The
State of Montana Administration Committee
State Capitol Building
Room 455 at 8:00 A.M.**

Thursday, February 5, 2015

**Testimony From: Gerald J. Gray, Sr., Director, Montana Indian Language
Preservation Pilot Program,
(Little Shell Tribal Native Languages (Cree, Chippewa & Michif) Program)**

Good morning

My name is Gerald J. Gray, Sr. I am the Director of the Little Shell Tribal Native Languages (Cree, Chippewa & Michif) Program.

The hearing for HB331 (Draft Bill LC2004) originated in the Little Shell Tribal Native Languages (Cree, Chippewa and Michif ((a mixture of Cree and French and Chippewa and French.)) Program. The Little Shell Tribal Council and members of the Tribes Native Language Advisory Board and program staff are all concerned about and want to see the word "squaw", "Half-breed" or "breed" from Maps, Signs, or Markers Whenever Agencies Update Maps or Replace signs and markers.

I, being of Chippewa and Cree decent on my father's side and Blackfeet - Cree on my mother's side and I am also of French Scottish decent on both parents sides, was often and still am referred to as "a Half Breed or Breed." While growing up on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, attending Browning Public Schools, graduating from Browning High School. While in attendance at the schools. I experienced being called very derogatorily -- "a dirty Half-Breed!" and I am

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ashamed to say that I experienced the same while attending and graduating from the University of Montana I experienced the same from a number of college students and non-Indians residing in the community. I also experienced my parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and other relatives, friends and Indian individuals in the community being called the same thing in Browning and in other cities throughout the State. As a result, I developed a very low self-esteem and a feeling of not being worthy as non-Indians.

Definition and Descriptions of HALF-BREED:

“The offspring of parents of different races; *especially*, the offspring of an American Indian and a white person.”

Street’ term for people of mixed race – suggests there are ‘pure breeds’ or races that are contaminated or watered down when people ‘mix’.

Half Breed among Indian and most White people is considered an offensive term for an offspring of parents of different races (especially of Caucasian and American Indian ancestry.)

Half-Caste - an offensive term for the offspring of parents of different races or cultures.

Words Related to Half Breed:

Mixed, mutt, Mongrel (Portuguese for dog), mixed race, oreo, biracial, half and half, half breed, half breeds

What the Term “Half Breed Implies:

This term “Half Breed” is usually used with disparaging intent and perceived as insulting, implying that a person of mixed race is somehow different or inferior.

I have heard non-Indians say on numerous occasions when their daughters were dating Half Breed youth or a young man, “I sure don't like my daughter dating a Half Breed and I sure don't want her marrying him!”

These unions were considered improper, and were suggestive of tainting and dilution of ethnicity. People of mixed descent such as “Half Breeds” were considered inferior. These unions were considered improper, and were suggestive of tainting and dilution of ethnicity. The morals and values back in the colonial era, where the colonial powers considered people from different ethnic groups as unequal by birth in their abilities, character and potential. Laws were enacted back then that made sexual relations and marriage between ethnic groups illegal.

Non-Indians would often say things around me because they did not know that I was an Indian or a "Breed" because I have a light complexion and I never told any non-Indians that I was an Indian or that I was "Breed," as I knew I would be subjected to some snide or racist remarks, ostercized, or made to feel I was out of place. My twin brother, we are fraternal twins, is very dark complexed and I witnessed him experiencing many racial remarks and actions because of his dark skin. My 3 brothers and two sister and my mother was very dark complexed; my father was light skinned like me. Over the generations "Half Breed" people experienced a harsh, shunned and a bizarre social treatment from non-Indians.

To still use the word "Half Breed" now is to suggest *that difference in social status still exists* and thus its offensiveness as, in part, similar to the way 'the n-word' is offensive. Modern activists have interpreted the "Half Breed or Breed" words "as a slanderous assault against Native Mixed Breed Indian people." There is no mistaking the strength in passion against these words. *I have never heard our Tribal Elders use the word Half Breed toward our people!* Why must we insult each other with the use of the words "Half-breed" or "breed" on Maps, Signs, Markers and Geographical Features?

When I hear the voices of our ancestors. I hear them asking for understanding and respect. I respectfully request that our language, our Native Indian people, and our history, be treated with respect! Can you help do this in their honor?

When we choose to change "Half Breed and Breed" place names, we can claim the opportunity to recover original indigenous place names, reinforce respect for local indigenous histories, and support Native language reclamation efforts rather than further insult and use a communication that belittles and berates somebody!

We can educate the general public to understand the marvelous diversity of our histories, languages, homelands and cultures, instead of stereotyping all Mixed-Blood Indians as instead of implying that we are a people of mixed race and are somehow different or inferior.

I respectfully request that you do what you can to help pass House Bell Number 331 – a Bill for an act entitled: "AN ACT REVISING SIGNAGE AND GEOGRAPHICAL DESIGNATION LAW; REQUIRING STATE LANDHOLDING AND LAND-MANAGING AGENCIES TO REMOVE THE WORDS "HALF-BREED OR BREED FROM MAPS, SIGNS, OR MARKERS WHENEVER AGENCIES UPDATE MAPS OR REPLACE SIGNS AND MARKERS BECAUSE OF VANDALISM and I respectfully request that a LITTLE SHELL CHIPPEWA TRIBAL MEMBER IS APPOINTED TO THE ADVISORY GROUP ON NAMING SITES AND FEATURES.