

HOUSE BILL NO. 750  
INTRODUCED BY F. WILMER

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT PROVIDING GRANTS FOR TRIBAL LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS FOR THE PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF MONTANA TRIBAL LANGUAGES; REQUIRING A CONSULTATIVE APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING THE GRANT PROGRAM; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

WHEREAS, because of the escalating loss of heritage language and the shift toward the use of English in native communities, only 34% of the 210 native languages used in North America are still being taught to children as a first language; and

WHEREAS, given the rapid deterioration of native languages, native communities across the country are making language recovery and preservation one of their highest priorities; and

WHEREAS, schools were once a major force in attempting to eradicate native languages in this country; and

WHEREAS, a native language immersion program is a proved and effective way to create fluent speakers in native languages, stem the loss of native languages, and produce native students who perform substantially better academically than native students who have not gone through an immersion program; and

WHEREAS, native American "code talkers" contributed to the creation of unbreakable codes that protected our troops' communications during the last two world wars, and native Americans should be honored for this role; and

WHEREAS, native language immersion programs can help bring many native languages and traditions back from the brink of extinction and provide Indian students in Montana the cognitive and psychological benefits of knowing their native language; and

WHEREAS, Article X, section 1(2), of the Montana Constitution recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians, and state law cites the importance of this heritage in its provisions for achieving a basic system of free quality public schools and in providing Indian education for all; and

WHEREAS, the Montana Supreme Court held in 1989 that Article X, section 1(2), "establishes a special burden in Montana for the education of American Indian children which must be addressed as a part of the school funding issues"; and

WHEREAS, the Montana Supreme Court observed in 2005 that the State of Montana did not challenge

a District Court finding that the state "has failed to recognize the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and that it has shown no commitment in its educational goals to the preservation of Indian cultural identity, as demanded by" the Montana Constitution; and

WHEREAS, Montana now has tribal language immersion school programs operating on the Blackfeet Reservation for the Blackfeet language, the Flathead Reservation for the Salish language, and the Fort Belknap Reservation for the White Clay, Gros Ventre, language; and

WHEREAS, these reservations, which serve a total of 100 students, have organized to help restore and maintain the languages of their respective tribal communities.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**NEW SECTION. Section 1. Tribal language immersion program grants -- guidelines.** (1) A native American language preservation and revitalization grant program is established within the office of public instruction for the purpose of allocating grant money to eligible tribal language immersion programs.

(2) The office of public instruction shall, in consultation with all Montana tribes, plan and develop an approach for administering tribal language immersion program grants that supports the preservation and revitalization of Montana's native American languages. Demonstration project grants must be provided for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2008, to illustrate applicable structures, methods, and staffing for tribal language immersion programs.

(3) A tribal language immersion program receiving a grant under this program must meet grant guidelines established by the office of public instruction.

**NEW SECTION. Section 2. Appropriation.** There is an appropriation of \$500,000 from the general fund to the office of public instruction to establish a native American language preservation and revitalization grant program. This funding is available in the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2007, for the purposes outlined in [section 1].

**NEW SECTION. Section 3. Codification instruction.** [Section 1] is intended to be codified as an integral part of Title 20, chapter 7, and the provisions of Title 20, chapter 7, apply to [section 1].

**NEW SECTION. Section 4. Notification to tribal governments.** The secretary of state shall send a

copy of [this act] to each tribal government located on the seven Montana reservations and to the Little Shell Chippewa tribe.

NEW SECTION. **Section 5. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2007.

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