

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 8, 2026

Issued by: Italian American One Voice Coalition (IAOVC)
a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS

Four Centuries of Presence. Sixteen Years of State Recognition. It Is Time for Federal Recognition.

RE: H.R. 5144 — the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe of Southampton County, Virginia, Federal Recognition Act

To: The Honorable Members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate

Cc: House Committee on Natural Resources; the press and media

Dear Members of Congress:

The Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) people have lived in what is now Southampton County, Virginia, for centuries. They have a documented history with the English Crown and the Commonwealth. They have never stopped being who they are. The United States government still does not recognize them.

On behalf of our Member Organizations and our individual members across the country, the Italian American One Voice Coalition (IAOVC) formally urges Congress to **co-sponsor and pass H.R. 5144**. The bill was introduced by Congresswoman Jennifer A. Kiggans (VA-02) in September 2025 and referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources. We ask that it be brought to the House floor for a vote.

The record is long, documented, and not in dispute

- **A long history in the region.** The name “Cheroenhaka” means “People at the Fork of the Stream.” Archaeological evidence places Native peoples in the region for thousands of years. The Tribe’s documented presence on its ancestral lands runs from at least the 1580s. The English first encountered the Tribe in the early 1600s and later called them “Nottoway.”
- **Treaties with the Crown.** The Tribe entered into formal treaty relationships with colonial Virginia, including the 1677 Treaty of Middle Plantation, which confirmed tribute obligations and certain land protections. Those lands were gradually lost to encroachment and forced sales over the following centuries.
- **Genealogy that can be verified.** Hundreds of tribal citizens, approximately 325, have been confirmed through documented genealogical lines to the ethno-historic surnames of the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Tribe.

- **A modern government.** The Tribe reorganized in 2002. It has an elected Chief and Tribal Council, governing documents, and a membership roll. It was formally recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2010.
- **Land and community.** The Tribe owns roughly 263 acres in Southampton County. There it hosts public Powwows, a School Day for students, and Cattashowrock Town, a replica of a 17th-century village. These programs preserve Cheroenhaka culture and teach it to the public.
- **Economic self-reliance.** The Tribe operates the Cheroenhaka Nottoway Enterprise LLC, which is recognized under the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development program.

Why recognition was denied: a wound created by government policy

The Tribe's path to federal recognition was obstructed by official acts of the state. The Virginia Racial Integrity Act of 1924, enforced for decades, directed that Native Virginians be reclassified on official records as "colored." This was administrative erasure. It destroyed the paper trail that federal acknowledgment standards now demand. A tribe cannot be fairly told to produce records that the government itself ordered altered.

H.R. 5144 acknowledges this history. It puts Congress on record that the absence of federal recognition reflects the damage done by past policy. It does not reflect any failure of the Tribe's identity or continuity.

What H.R. 5144 does, and what it does not do

H.R. 5144 would:

- Extend federal recognition to the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe of Southampton County, Virginia.
- Make the Tribe and its members eligible for the federal services and benefits available to other recognized tribes, including health care, education, and housing assistance.
- Affirm the Tribe's existing membership roll and governing documents.
- Allow the Secretary of the Interior, upon the Tribe's request, to take tribal lands into trust.

H.R. 5144 would not:

- Allow the Tribe to conduct gaming. The bill expressly prohibits it.
- Affect existing hunting, fishing, or water rights.

The bill asks Congress to correct a documented injustice without creating any new controversy.

A leader who has served this country

The Tribe is led by Chief Walter "Red Hawk" Brown III, a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel and Vietnam veteran. He served eight years on the Southampton County Board of Supervisors and has held appointments on state boards. He has led the Tribe since 2002. He has given his working life to the United States and to his people, and he now asks his country to recognize them in return. Chief Brown has said the Tribe is grateful to Congresswoman Kiggans for her support.

Why the Italian American One Voice Coalition is speaking

We are a Coalition of Italian American organizations and individuals. We know what it means to have a people's history dismissed or erased. Our Coalition has committed to Solidarity Sessions that bring communities together. Native Americans, Italian Americans, and many others take part. Unity of that kind means little if the first peoples of this land are not given the dignity of recognition from the nation they have served.

The Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Tribe has the history, the genealogy, the governance, the community, and the support of its Commonwealth. It has been waiting long enough.

Our request

We respectfully but firmly call on every Member of Congress to:

1. **Co-sponsor H.R. 5144** and add your name to the bill.
2. **Urge the House Committee on Natural Resources** to advance the bill to markup.
3. **Bring H.R. 5144 to the floor** of the House for a vote.
4. **Support companion action in the Senate.**

Our members and the public will be watching. We ask the press to report on this bill and on the Tribe's story. The country should know about it.

Respectfully,

Andre' DiMino

President

Italian American One Voice Coalition (IAOVC)

About the IAOVC: The Italian American One Voice Coalition is an IRS-registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization that brings together Italian American organizations and individuals to speak with a unified voice on civil rights, heritage, and community solidarity. Information: iaovc.org

About the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe: Recognized by the Commonwealth of Virginia since 2010, the Tribe is headquartered in Courtland, Southampton County, Virginia, and is led by Chief Walt "Red Hawk" Brown. Information: cheroenhaka-nottoway.org

###