

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2551

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
State Government & Tribal Relations

**Title:** An act relating to permitting students to wear traditional tribal regalia and objects of cultural significance at graduation ceremonies and related events.

**Brief Description:** Permitting students to wear traditional tribal regalia and objects of cultural significance at graduation ceremonies and related events.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Lekanoff, Ramel, Rude, Leavitt, Valdez, Davis, Doglio, Walen, Pollet, Macri, Ormsby and Santos.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/4/20, 2/7/20 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Precludes school districts, public schools, and institutions of higher education from prohibiting students from wearing traditional tribal regalia or objects of Native American cultural significance at graduation ceremonies or related school events.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins and Mosbrucker.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 1 member: Representative Smith.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member.

**Staff:** Jason Zolle (786-7124).

**Background:**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The history of wearing a cap and gown at graduation is believed to date back to twelfth-century Europe. Many teachers wore clerical clothing (hoods and gowns) and students adopted the same look. Some historians think that the gowns were especially necessary to stay warm in the unheated buildings where graduations took place. This academic dress from Europe started to gain popularity in America around the time of independence. There was a decline in such dress after the Civil War, but the American Intercollegiate Commission met in 1894 at Columbia University to standardize the style and color for robes and hoods: they settled on black gowns in which the lining of the hood indicates the university and the border color indicates the academic discipline. This standardization has largely remained constant over the years, although certain details have changed.

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**Summary of Substitute Bill:**

School districts, public schools, and institutions of higher education may not prohibit students from wearing traditional tribal regalia or objects of Native American cultural significance at graduation ceremonies or related school events. These academic institutions must update any relevant policies or procedures accordingly.

This bill applies to 2020 graduating classes and subsequent graduating classes.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill permits the wearing of traditional tribal regalia or objects of Native American cultural significance without them having to be worn as adornments. The substitute bill applies the bill to the 2020 graduating class for institutions of higher education and adds an emergency clause.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) There are young men and women who are graduating and want to share their Native American heritage by wearing tribal regalia at graduation. These students honor the cap and gown, but they want to bring their past and culture with them. Some schools allow it, but many schools do not. Every indigenous student has the right to wear tribal regalia to show their resilience. It honors their ancestors who had to suppress their culture and heritage. This bill will help repair relationships between indigenous people and the school community. It will also improve graduation rates by providing an incentive for students to

graduate. Society has outgrown the need for conformity that has been around since medieval times, and students should be able to wear what they want to graduation.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Lekanoff, prime sponsor; Grey Webster, Sienna Reid, and Deviney Wynecoop, Western Washington University Native American Student Union; Laura Lynn, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Arthur West.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.