

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Blanca Rubio, Chair

AB 2507 (Nguyen and Soria) – As Introduced February 20, 2026

**SUBJECT:** Office of Tribal Affairs.

**SUMMARY:** This bill would further establish within the Office of the Governor, the Office of Tribal Affairs (Office), which is headed by the Secretary of Tribal Affairs who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor, as specified. The Secretary of Tribal Affairs shall serve as the Governor's principal advisor on tribal affairs and facilitate, to the extent feasible, government-to-government engagement between tribal governments and state agencies.

The bill would require each state agency that engages, or has programs, services, or responsibilities affecting tribal governments to, among other things, designate a tribal liaison, as described. The bill would require the Office to be advised by a Tribal Advisory Committee, as described, and would require the committee to, among other things, provide recommendations and tribal perspectives to assist the office in strengthening government-to-government engagement and improving the design, access, and implementation of state programs and services affecting tribal governments, as specified. **Specifically, this bill:**

1) Codifies further the Office, which is headed by the Secretary of Tribal Affairs who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor, as specified.

2) Provides each state agency that engages, or has programs, services, or responsibilities affecting tribal governments shall do all of the following:

- a) Designate a tribal liaison.
- b) Place the position of the tribal liaison in the executive office, reporting directly to the chief executive of the state agency.
- c) Ensure the position serves as the primary point of contact for tribal governments and facilitates communication, coordination, and engagement necessary to support effective government-to-government relations,
- d) Notify the office within 30 days of vacancy, appointment, or replacement of a tribal liaison.
- e) Adopt a tribal consultation policy consistent with Executive Orders B-10-11 and N-15-19.

3) Provides the Office shall be advised by a Tribal Advisory Committee consisting of nine tribal chair members, with three nominated by tribes in the northern region, three in the central region, and three in the southern region. Members shall be appointed by the Governor from tribal nominations, no later than the second quarter of 2027. The members of the committee shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for all necessary expenses actually incurred in the performance of their duties.

4) Provides the term of office of the members shall be three years and the terms shall be staggered at one-year intervals. Upon initial appointment, one member from each region shall be appointed for a term ending January 1, 2028, one member from each region shall be appointed

for a term ending January 1, 2029, and one member from each region shall be appointed for a term ending January 1, 2030. Thereafter, each appointed member shall serve a three-year term.

- 5) States commencing the second quarter of 2027 after being appointed by the Governor, the committee shall meet regularly, but not fewer than three times annually, at the call of the secretary. Commencing the first quarter of 2028, the committee shall meet regularly, but not fewer than four times annually, at the call of the secretary.
- 6) Provides the committee shall provide guidance, recommendations, and tribal perspectives to assist the office in strengthening government-to-government engagement and improving the design, access, and implementation of state programs and services affecting tribal governments.
- 7) Provides the committee shall not supplant formal consultation processes or exercise approval authority over state agency actions.
- 8) States the committee shall be subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.
- 9) Provides the office, in conjunction with the committee, shall do all of the following:
  - a) Review and recommend improvements to the consultation policies and consultation practices of each state agency and consistency across state agencies.
  - b) Identify barriers that limit tribal governments' ability to access, participate in, or benefit from state programs, services, and funding, including contracting practices, timelines, administrative requirements, or confidentiality concerns.
  - c) Recommend statewide strategies that recognize and leverage tribal sovereignty, governmental authority, regulatory frameworks, taxation systems, and operational capacity to advance shared state and tribal goals.
  - d) Develop guidance for state agencies on effective tribal engagement, including communication protocols, timelines for consultation, and opportunities to incorporate tribal expertise, knowledge, and stewardship practices early in the design, implementation, operation, and evaluation of state programs and services.
  - e) Identify cross-agency issues that affect tribal governments and recommend coordinated approaches to improve efficiency, alignment, and outcomes.
  - f) Provide recommendations on the appropriate responsibilities, authority, qualifications, and expectations for tribal liaisons and tribal policy advisors.
- 10) Provides the office shall do all of the following:
  - a) Support the implementation of consultation policies and facilitate direct engagement between state agencies and tribal governments.
  - b) Provide training, guidance, and technical assistance to tribal liaisons and state agency personnel to promote consistent, culturally informed, and effective government-to-government engagement practices.
  - c) Improve cross-agency communication and coordination to ensure consistent approaches to tribal matters and avoid conflicting processes or requirements.
  - d) Keep tribal governments informed of state-level policy developments affecting their programs, responsibilities, or interests.
  - e) Track whether state agencies have established or updated consultation policies and employed or designated tribal liaisons consistent with this section.

- f) Maintain an online, publicly accessible and up-to-date tribal liaison contact list for all state agencies, and a publicly accessible and up-to-date list of adopted tribal consultation policies.

11) Contains various definitions that apply to the bill.

12) Makes legislative findings and declarations.

#### **EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes, within the office of the Governor, the office of the Governor's Tribal Advisor, which is headed by the Governor's Tribal Advisor (Advisor) who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. The Governor's Tribal Advisor shall be an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe in California.
- 2) Establishes the Tribal Nation Grant Fund (TNGF), administered by the California Gambling Control Commission, for the receipt and deposit of monies received by the state from Indian tribes pursuant to the terms of tribal-state gaming compacts. Under existing law, monies in the TNGF are available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for the discretionary distribution of funds to nongaming and limited-gaming tribes, as specified.
- 3) Establishes the TNGF Program and authorizes TNGF Panel to award grants from available monies within the fund and make other distributions from the fund to eligible tribes, as specified.
- 4) Requires the Governor's Tribal Advisor to provide an annual report to the Legislature on the status of the TNGF relating to the program's activities and resources needed to maintain the program, as specified.
- 5) Through federal law, provides for the negotiation and execution of tribal-state gaming compacts for the purpose of authorizing certain types of gaming on Indian lands within the state Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 (IGRA), 18 U.S.C. Sections 1166 to 1168, inclusive and 25 U.S.C. Section 2701, et. seq.
- 6) Authorizes the Governor to negotiate and conclude gaming compacts, subject to ratification by the Legislature, with specified Indian tribes.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** This bill is keyed fiscal by Legislative Counsel.

#### **COMMENTS:**

Purpose of the bill. According to the author, "AB 2507 reflects the importance of maintaining a strong government-to-government relationship with Tribal governments. In my district, Wilton Rancheria is an important part of the Elk Grove community, and that relationship has made clear how important consistent consultation and engagement with Tribal governments is across state agencies.

Today, many parts of the state's tribal affairs framework exist through executive orders and agency policies rather than clearly in statute, and consultation practices can vary from one agency to another. AB 2507 helps bring greater clarity and consistency by codifying the Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs, clarifying tribal liaison roles, and establishing a Tribal

Advisory Committee. This bill helps ensure California’s engagement with Tribal governments is structured, transparent, and consistent moving forward.”

What problem does this bill solve? According to information provided by the author’s office, “Over the past 15 years, California has undertaken administrative and legislative actions to include tribal governments in state programs addressing tribal needs. However, these policies and programs were often developed without sufficient tribal consultation, resulting in barriers to tribal participation and underperforming outcomes.

In response, tribal governments undertook significant outreach efforts to collaborate with state agencies and improve program performance. Tribes hosted educational sessions, tours, listening sessions, and other events to help state personnel better understand their needs. They also pursued legislation to remove barriers from state programs and supported the creation of Tribal Advisory Committees (TACs) to guide improvements to existing programs.

Despite these efforts, more work still needs to be done. The structures supporting tribal engagement across state government remain inconsistent and fragmented. Tribal liaisons’ roles vary widely in placement and authority across agencies, consultation practices differ among departments, and TACs are often created on a program-by program basis rather than through a coordinated statewide framework. These conditions make it difficult for tribal governments to effectively engage state agencies and limit the state’s ability to design programs that successfully meet their intended policy goals.”

More recently, tribes launched a coordinated educational effort, inviting the Administration’s housing leaders and state lawmakers to participate in tribal housing tours, listening sessions, and roundtable discussions. These collaborative engagements produced incremental improvements and ultimately contributed to the enactment of SB 1187 (McGuire, Statutes of 2024) and AB 1878 (Garcia, Statutes of 2024). Together, these measures established a Tribal Housing Grant Program Advisory Committee charged with identifying barriers, inconsistencies, and necessary program adjustments.

However, the passage of these bills also underscored broader structural challenges. Many tribal programs across state agencies continue to be developed without sufficient tribal consultation or input. Programmatic barriers persist, including inconsistent contracting requirements—such as limited waivers of sovereign immunity. Additionally, agencies and departments often introduce amendments late in the legislative process, leaving little opportunity for meaningful collaboration with tribes.

### **Background.**

According to most recent census data, California is home to more people of Native American/ Alaska Native heritage than any other state in the Country. There are currently 109 federally recognized Indian tribes in California and several non-federally recognized tribes petitioning for federal recognition through the Bureau of Indian Affairs - Office of Federal Acknowledgement.

Tribes in California currently have nearly 100 separate reservations or Rancherias. There are also a number of individual Indian trust allotments. These lands constitute “Indian Country”, and a different jurisdictional applies in Indian Country. Some are near highly populated cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Sacramento. While others are in rural areas some 20

miles from the nearest hospital. Some are in the mountains of northern and eastern California, others in the high deserts of southern and southeastern California. While some are located on the coast, on the rivers, and around the lakes.

According to the 2010 U.S. report, California represents 12 percent of the total Native American population (approximately 720,000) identifying themselves as Native American. California's tribes are as small as five members and as large as 5,000 members.

In recent decades, indigenous communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, showing continued commitment to defending tribal sovereignty, retaining traditional practices, and pursuing legal avenues to reverse termination and gain federal recognition.

The narrative of California's first people is a testament to the indomitable spirit of indigenous communities in the face of relentless adversity. Despite centuries of colonization, forced assimilation, land dispossession, and discriminatory policies, these communities continue to assert their rights, champion their cultural heritage, and endeavor towards a future that acknowledges and respects their sovereignty.

Federally recognized tribes have a unique government to government relationship with local, state and federal governments, and are recognized as sovereign nations. Rooted in long-standing legal frameworks, tribal sovereignty is strengthened through economic self-reliance. Tribes can create their own laws, governmental structure and enrollment or membership rules for the land and citizens of their nation.

California's tribes work closely with the state on environmental, legal, and cultural matters, with many maintaining tribal lands. California tribes are known for a profound, sustainable relationship with the land. For instance, the Karuk Tribe is currently leading efforts in traditional cultural burning for environmental management.

Tribes throughout the state have experienced a significant resurgence in cultural and economic self-reliance, including the development of local governments, economic activity, and gaming enterprises.

The author notes that this measure reaffirms the state's commitment to building enduring partnerships with tribes, respecting their sovereignty, and ensuring their voices remain integral in shaping the state's future. These actions will strengthen collaborative governance, improve outcomes for all Californians, and set a national standard for inclusive and respectful leadership.

Executive Orders issued. For decades, tribal communities have been excluded from benefiting from state-administered programs. To improve communication and consideration of the needs of tribes, Governor Brown issued Executive Order (EO) B-10-11 in 2011. This order established the Governor's Office of the Tribal Advisor and requires all state agencies and departments to encourage early consideration, communication, and consultation with tribes when developing legislation, guidelines, regulations, rules, or policies on matters that affect tribes and their communities.

In 2019, Governor Newsom issued EO N-15-19, which reaffirmed the previous executive order and added a formal apology to California's First Nations for atrocities committed and

discriminatory practices enacted by the State against tribal communities. This marked a major step forward in California's commitment to acknowledge past wrongdoings and build relationships with tribes. The work to explore the historical relationship between California's First Nations and the State as well as to recommend paths forward continues through the California Truth & Healing Council.

Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs. The Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs is responsible for overseeing and implementing effective government-to-government consultation between the Newsom Administration and California tribes on policies that affect California tribal communities. Led by the Tribal Affairs Secretary, the Office serves as a direct link between California tribes and the Governor, advises the Governor and Executive Administration Officials, facilitates communication and consultation between tribes and state agencies, reviews and provides recommendations on state legislation and regulations affecting tribes and formulates and implements the Administration's Native American policy priorities.

The mission of the Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs is to elevate issues of mutual importance to tribal nations and the Governor's Administration as informed by meaningful government-to-government consultation and collaboration.

In implementing the Governor's policy priorities related to tribal nations, Native communities and Indigenous peoples, the Office continues to work with tribal nations to:

- Improve government-to-government relations,
- Advance justice and equity for California Native peoples,
- Explore remedial actions to address past atrocities,
- Expand tribal stewardship of ancestral lands and natural and cultural resources,
- Promote visibility of the rich diversity and history of California Native cultures, and
- Partner with tribal governments to bolster sound and sustainable economic development in California Indian Country.

Tribal Advisory Committees. Many state agencies have created Tribal Advisory Committees (TAC) as specialized bodies designed to facilitate government-to-government consultation between Native American tribes and state or federal agencies. They address critical issues such as health, environmental protection, transportation, and natural resources, ensuring tribal input on policies and projects.

Key tribal advisory committees in California include: CalEPA Tribal Advisory Committee (CalEPA TAC): Advises on environmental issues, cultural resource protection, and land stewardship; the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC): Improves communication and advises on social services impacting tribes; and Caltrans Native American Advisory Committee (NAAC): Provides guidance on transportation programs and policies.

At the federal level the California Area Tribal Advisory Committee (established in March 1998) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Focuses on health issues and acts as a liaison with the Indian Health Service; and in 2015, the US Department of Agriculture initiated the California Tribal Advisory Committee: The TAC is a forum for the Native American Tribes and tribal members in California to address natural resource issues on tribal lands; and

Generally, these committees often meet quarterly and are composed of tribal representatives from different regions of the state.

Native American Heritage Commission. In recognition of the growing sophistication of California Indian governments, the state legislature created the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) in 1976 (Chapter 1332, Statutes of 1976). This nine-member body, appointed by the Governor, works as a liaison between state, federal, and tribal governments. The NAHC identifies, catalogs, and protects cultural resources—including ancient places of special religious or social significance, as well as known graves and cemeteries—on both private and public lands in California. Additionally, the NAHC ensures tribal access to sacred sites on public lands and oversees the treatment and disposition of inadvertently discovered Native American human remains and burial items.

Department of the Interior. In 2021, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) established the Secretary’s Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC) to create a permanent forum for Tribal leaders to engage directly and consistently with the Secretary and other senior Department officials. The STAC is intended to ensure that Tribal leaders, along with current and future Secretaries, have a dedicated space to build consensus, exchange perspectives, share information, and provide advice and recommendations on programs and funding affecting Tribes across the Department. The Committee is composed of 24 representatives: one primary Tribal representative and one alternate from each of the 12 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) regions.

In support. The California Tribal Business Alliance writes, “AB 2507 will strengthen the state’s administrative framework for government-to-government (G2G) relations with tribal governments to improve the development, coordination, and effectiveness of the state’s tribal programs. Over the last fifteen years, California began an important shift in tribal-state policy through executive actions that established the Office of the Tribal Advisor and advanced consultation with tribal governments. The shift gained momentum as the Legislature began opening state programs to tribal governments. One important example was AB 1010 (Garcia, Statutes of 2019), which allowed tribes to participate in state housing programs and included flexibility for the state to modify or waive program requirements to adapt the programs to tribal governments. Despite the flexibility, many of the state’s tribal housing programs were developed without tribal consultation, contained programmatic barriers limiting tribal access, and underperformed. This bill addresses the structural problems by establishing a clearer administrative framework to enhance G2G relations and the effectiveness of tribal-state policies and programs.”

The Pala Band of Mission Indians writes, “For decades, tribal governments primarily engaged with the federal government, consistent with the federal trust responsibility. California has taken important steps to include tribal governments in state programs. Those efforts were necessary, but they also exposed a consistent problem: many programs affecting tribal governments were not designed with tribal governments in mind. We have seen this firsthand. Programs roll out with barriers, requirements that do not fit tribal governments, and limited access to funding. Tribal leaders then step in, educating agencies, identifying issues, and working with policymakers to fix what should have been addressed from the start. This pattern is not isolated. It repeats across housing, public safety, health, natural resources, and other areas of state government. Too often, the fixes come late in the process, without the benefit of meaningful collaboration. AB 2507 provides a better path. By strengthening the state’s administrative

framework for tribal engagement, this bill ensures tribal governments are brought into the process earlier, agencies are better coordinated, and programs are designed to work as intended.”

The Wilton Rancheria writes, “By codifying the Office of Tribal Affairs within the Governor’s Office, establishing a Tribal Advisory Committee representing Northern, Central, and Southern California, and ensuring tribal liaisons are located within agency executive offices, this bill creates a clearer and more consistent framework for engagement. It helps ensure tribal perspectives are incorporated earlier, agencies are better coordinated, and programs are designed to work as intended. AB 2507 will strengthen G2G relations between California and tribal governments, leading to better policy, more effective programs, and stronger communities for all Californians.”

Prior legislation. AB 221 (Ramos), Chapter 129, Statutes of 2025. Made various changes to the TNGF and the processes used by the TNGF Panel (Panel) for awarding grants from the fund’s available resources and for distributing funds to eligible tribes, as specified. Specifically, this bill revised the grant distribution by authorizing the Panel to award grants as specific distribution grants to fund a specifically described purpose or project, or as equal shares grants for distribution to eligible tribes in equal amounts, as specified.

AB 1878 (Garcia), Chapter 266, Statutes of 2024. Created the Tribal Housing Grant Program Fund Advisory Committee within the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), upon appropriation; makes changes to tribal liaison and technical assistance requirements that apply to HCD; and limit HCD’s ability to require tribes to waive sovereign immunity to access funding, as specified.

AB 1965 (B. Rubio) of 2024. This bill would have established the Office of Tribal Affairs within the California Department of Public Health. Would have required that the Office of Tribal Affairs be led by the Tribal Health Liaison, who must be appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the State Public Health Officer. Would have required the Tribal Health Liaison, among other duties, to regularly consult with California tribal representatives, as specified, and oversee the department’s tribal health equity meetings, advisory groups, and workgroups. (Senate Committee on Appropriations – Held on Suspense File)

SB 1187 (McGuire), Chapter 295, Statutes of 2024. Created a new tribal housing program, the Tribal Housing Grant Program, in the Department of Housing and Community Development for the construction and rehabilitation of rental and for-sale housing.

AB 1495 (Nguyen) of 2023. This bill would have established a Deputy of Tribal Affairs in every state agency, as defined, and in every constitutional office, as defined. The bill would have established a Tribal Advisor position in the executive office of every state agency, as defined. The bill would require the Governor to appoint a Tribal Advisory Committee, as specified, to the Secretary of the Office of Tribal Affairs. (Never referred to a policy committee)

AB 1010 (Garcia), Chapter 660, Statutes of 2019. Made the governing body of Indian reservations and Rancherias eligible to receive funding from various state affordable housing programs.

AB 880 (Gray), Chapter 801 of Statutes of 2018. Established within the office of the Governor, the office of the Governor’s Tribal Advisor, to be headed by the Governor’s Tribal Advisor, who

is to be appointed by, and serve at the pleasure of, the Governor. The bill also established the TNGF program and the TNGF Panel, and authorized the Panel to award grants from available funds in the TNGF to nongaming, and limited-gaming tribes, as specified.

AB 1355 (Gray), Chapter 118, Statutes of 2016. Specified that the TNGF reflects a vision of facilitating the development of tribal institutions and improving the quality of life of tribal people throughout the state.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

California Tribal Business Alliance  
Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake  
Pala Band of Mission Indians  
Wilton Rancheria

**Opposition**

None on file

**Analysis Prepared by:** Eric Johnson / G.O. / (916) 319-2531