
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Senator Susan Rubio

Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: AB 2507 **Hearing Date:** 6/23/2026
Author: Nguyen, et al.
Version: 2/20/2026 Introduced
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Felipe Lopez

SUBJECT: Office of Tribal Affairs

DIGEST: This bill restructures the office of the Governor's Tribal Advisor (Advisor) to instead become the Office of Tribal Affairs (OTA) and requires the OTA, among other things, to facilitate direct engagement between state agencies and tribal governments, among other responsibilities.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes, within the office of the Governor, the office of the Governor's Tribal Advisor, which is headed by the Advisor who is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. The Advisor is required to be an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe in California.
- 2) Requires the Governor's Tribal Advisor to provide an annual report to the Legislature on the status of the Tribal Nation Grant Fund (TNGF) relating to the program's activities and resources needed to maintain the program, as specified.
- 3) Encourages the state and its agencies to consult on a government-to-government basis with federally recognized tribes and as specified, with nonfederally recognized tribes, in order to allow tribal officials, the opportunity to provide meaningful input in the development of policies, processes, programs, and projects that have tribal implications.
- 4) Encourages and authorizes all state agencies to cooperate with funds and recognized California tribes on matters of economic development and improvement of the tribes, including providing information on programs available to assist Indian tribes, providing technical assistance on the

preparation of grants and applications for public and private funds, and conducting meetings and workshops.

- 5) Establishes the 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.
- 6) Establishes the TNGF Program and authorizes the TNGF Panel to award grants from available monies within the fund and make other distributions from the fund to eligible tribes, as specified.

This bill:

- 1) Restructures the Office of Tribal Affairs to instead become the OTA, which shall be headed by the Secretary of Tribal Affairs.
- 2) Requires the Secretary of Tribal Affairs to 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.
- 3) Requires the OTA to 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 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.
 - d) Keep tribal governments informed of state-level policy developments.
 - e) Track whether state agencies have established or updated consultation policies and employed or designated tribal liaisons consistent with the provisions of this bill.
 - 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.
- 4) Requires each state agency that engages, or has services affecting tribal governments to do all of the following:

- a) Designate a tribal liaison and place the position in the executive office, and report directly to the chief of the executive of the agency.
 - b) Ensure the position serves as the primary contact for tribal governments.
 - c) Notify the office within 30 days of a vacancy, appointment, or replacement of a tribal liaison.
 - d) Adopt a tribal consultation policy, as specified.
- 5) Requires the OTA to be advised by a Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) 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, as specified.
- 6) Requires the TAC to provide guidance, recommendations, and tribal perspectives to assist the OTA in strengthening government-to-government engagement and improving the design, access, and implementation of state programs and services affecting tribal governments.
- 7) Provides that the TAC shall not supplant formal consultation processes or exercise approval authority over state agency actions.
- 8) Requires the OTA, in conjunction with the TAC to do all of the following:
- a) Review and recommend improvements to the consultation policies and practices of state agencies.
 - b) Identify barriers that limit tribal government's ability to access, participate, or benefit from state programs.
 - c) Recommend statewide strategies to advance shared state and tribal goals.
 - d) Develop guidance for state agencies on effective tribal engagement, as specified.
 - e) Identify cross agency issues that affect tribal governments and recommend coordinated approaches to improve efficiency.
 - f) Provide recommendations on the appropriate responsibilities, authority, qualifications, and expectations for tribal liaisons and tribal policy advisors.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author's office, "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 it clear how important consistent consultation and engagement with Tribal governments across state agencies. California has taken important steps to strengthen its relationship with

Tribal governments. However, consultation and engagement practices can still vary from one agency to another. AB 2507 builds on that progress by codifying the Office of Tribal Affairs, clarifying tribal liaison roles, and establishing a Tribal Advisory Committee. These changes will help create a more consistent and coordinated approach to government-to-government engagement and ensure Tribal governments are engaged early when decisions may affect their communities.”

Tribal Governments in California. According to the most recent census data, California is home to more residents of Native American and Alaska Native heritage than any other state in the nation. The state currently has 109 federally recognized Indian tribes, as well as several non-federally recognized tribes petitioning for federal recognition through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Federal Acknowledgment.

California tribes hold nearly 100 separate reservations or rancherias, in addition to a number of individual Indian trust allotments. Collectively, these lands constitute "Indian Country," a designation that carries distinct jurisdictional implications. These lands span a wide range of geographies — from areas near major metropolitan centers such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, and Sacramento, to rural communities located more than 20 miles from the nearest hospital. Tribal lands extend across the mountains of northern and eastern California, the high deserts of the south and southeast, and along the state's coastlines, rivers, and lakeshores.

Federally recognized tribes maintain a unique government-to-government relationship with local, state, and federal governments and are recognized as sovereign nations. Grounded in long-standing legal frameworks, tribal sovereignty is further reinforced through economic self-reliance. Tribes retain the authority to establish their own laws, governmental structures, and enrollment criteria for the lands and citizens of their nations.

This bill seeks to reaffirm the state's commitment to building enduring partnerships with California's tribes, honoring their sovereignty, and ensuring their voices remain central to shaping the state's future. The author's office believes these efforts will strengthen collaborative governance, improve outcomes for all Californians, and establish a national model for inclusive and respectful leadership.

State Action and Executive Orders. On September 19, 2011, Governor Brown issued Executive Order B-10-11, which established the Office of the Governor's Tribal advisor to oversee and implement effective government-to-government consultation between the Administration and Tribes on policies that affect California tribal communities. The Office of the Tribal Advisor was formally placed in statute by AB 880 (Gray, Chapter 801, Statutes of 2018).

On June 18, 2019, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-15-19, which acknowledges and apologizes on behalf of the state for the historical “violence, exploitation, dispossession and the attempted destruction of tribal communities” which dislocated California Native Americans from their ancestral land and sacred practices and established the California Truth and Healing Council. In addition, Executive Order N-15-19 reaffirms and incorporates by reference the principles of government-to-government engagements.

In 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 923 (Ramos, Chapter 475, Statutes of 2022) which encourages the state and its agencies to consult on a government-to-government basis with federally recognized and, as specified, with nonfederally recognized tribes, in order to allow tribal officials the opportunity to provide meaningful input in the development of policies, processes, programs, and projects that have tribal implications.

Governor’s Office of Tribal Affairs. The OTA would be responsible for supporting the implementation of agency consultation policies, providing training and guidance to tribal liaisons and state agency personnel, improving cross-agency coordination on tribal matters, and keeping tribal governments informed of relevant state policy developments. The OTA would also track agency compliance with this bill's consultation and liaison requirements, and maintain publicly accessible, up-to-date lists of tribal liaison contacts and adopted tribal consultation policies for all state agencies.

Each state agency that engages with or provides services affecting tribal governments would be required to designate a tribal liaison positioned within the agency's executive office, reporting directly to the agency head and serving as the primary point of contact for tribal governments. Agencies would also be required to adopt a tribal consultation policy and notify the OTA within 30 days of any vacancy, appointment, or change in their tribal liaison.

The OTA would be advised by the TAC consisting of nine tribal chairs — three nominated from each of the state's northern, central, and southern regions. The TAC would provide guidance, recommendations, and tribal perspectives to assist the OTA in strengthening government-to-government engagement and improving the design, accessibility, and delivery of state programs affecting tribal governments.

Jointly, the OTA and TAC would review and recommend improvements to agency consultation practices, identify barriers limiting tribal governments' access to state programs, develop guidance on effective tribal engagement, surface cross-agency issues affecting tribal governments, and recommend coordinated strategies to advance shared state and tribal goals — including defining appropriate

qualifications, responsibilities, and expectations for tribal liaisons and tribal policy advisors.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 923 (Ramos, Chapter 475, Statutes of 2022) encourages the state and its agencies to consult on a government-to-government basis with federally recognized and as specified, with nonfederally recognized tribes, in order to allow tribal officials the opportunity to provide meaningful input in the development of policies, processes, programs, and projects that have tribal implications.

AB 1878 (Garcia Chapter 266, Statutes of 2024) creates 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, 2024) would have established the Office of Tribal Affairs within the California Department of Public Health, required that the Office of Tribal Affairs be led by the Tribal Health Liaison,, 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. (Held in the Senate Appropriations 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, 2023) 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 also have required the Governor to appoint a Tribal Advisory Committee, as specified, to the Secretary of the Office of Tribal Affairs. (Held in the Assembly Rules Committee)

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

Wilton Rancheria (Source)

California Municipal Utilities Association
California Tribal Business Alliance
Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake
Pala Band of Mission Indians
Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians
Wilton Rancheria
Yurok Tribe

OPPOSITION:

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the Wilton Rancheria, “for decades, tribal governments primarily engaged with the federal government, consistent with the federal trust responsibility. Over the last fifteen years, California has taken important steps to engage tribal governments through consultation and by opening state programs to tribal participation. These steps were necessary and meaningful, but they also revealed a fundamental challenge: many state programs affecting tribal governments were not designed with tribal governments in mind. We have seen this most clearly in housing. Programs were created with good intentions, but without sufficient tribal input, resulting in barriers that made them difficult to access or ineffective in practice. By codifying the Office of Tribal Affairs within the Governor’s Office, establishing a Tribal advisory Committee, and ensuring tribal liaisons are located within agency executive offices, this bill creates a clearer and more consistent framework for engagement.”