

## Advisory Committee on Reconciliation in Place Names,

I am writing to express my support for the Coalition for Outdoor Renaming and Education (CORE) comments made in previous meetings and to emphasize needed changes to be made to the Committee. To begin, I support name changes CORE is working on like that of Kuwohi in Tennessee, and encourage this Committee to continue to be dedicated to this important work.

This committee has an obligation to the people of the United States to attempt to reconcile problematic history that remains a part of our everyday life through the naming of geographic features. These efforts must be swift, equitable, and transparent to all communities, including consideration of all groups of individuals (such as ensuring name changes match on braille texts). When making these changes accessible to all, the changes will become more well-known and accepted, as well as teach our people the history of the land we walk on, including ensuring signage change and investing in education programs at the sites to make name changes meaningful. To achieve reconciliation, this committee must ensure that name changes are created for all marginalized communities with legacies or hurt, discrimination, and oppression.

Representation must go beyond symbolism and master proactive inclusion of different groups that allow them to have the agency these names often represent their lack. The committee must work past just an engaged community, and foster communities of agency, active engagement, compassion, and equity. This inclusion should be defined in the process for this Committee to ensure equal representation and consideration for all communities. I understand that the Committee is currently limited in scope and time, so to help alleviate this process and expand capacity, I ask that you increase direct communication and engagement between the Committee and organizations active in this work. This Committee should work to uplift BIPOC and marginalized communities and their initiatives by working alongside these organizations and attending conferences to be both educators and learners.

I support the creation of an education and research branch of this Committee, but urge the Committee to dedicate more of its efforts to these initiatives. Many problematic names are left behind because of ignorance, time passed, or a lack of dedication on behalf of our country's politicians to the real histories of these locations. Education campaigns and dedication to widespread changes at the location are necessary to ensure name changes meet their intended impact and reconcile the pain past names have caused. To create meaningful change and reach any kind of reconciliation, we must commit to finding all of these harmful names and rectifying generations of pain.

Changing names is more than just trying to reconcile the pains of the past, but is to reframe the biased teaching of our nation's history to reclaim the truth behind our land and create a more positive, accepting future. With this in mind, the Committee must make every

move with significant intention and conviction to uproot the current systems and do right by our people. The dominant narratives are harmful and changing these narratives allows for expansion of public access to our country's nature.

All of these efforts must include the key component of transparency. A key to this kind of work is unity and combined efforts. With transparency, organizations across the US can work with this Committee to foster changes within society and the legal system by supporting this committee's efforts and aiding in finding more problematic names to be targeted. Thousands of people doing similar work across the nation can and should be utilized by this Committee as much as possible to enact the widespread change that this Committee may not have the capacity to achieve alone. This requires transparency at all points in the process and the dedication of this Committee to creating changes beyond its immediate reach. By creating a new location on the Committee's website, these initiatives can be easily accessed, supported, and bolstered by those in this sector across the country. Meetings with these groups can also help narrow the focus of the Committee to specific terms, places, and histories to be rectified and allow for experts from all communities to be included in this process. I also request that the Committee read and respond to every submitted public comment, including the Committee's reasoning behind support or refusal of suggested efforts.

The current climate provides a uniquely ambitious opportunity to create significant change in our nation. With the upcoming election, more individuals are attentive to issues they care about, allowing for media and information campaigns to be more successful at this time, and it is thus a recommendation of this statement, focusing specifically on our nation's politically active youth. As seen with the public comments from youth on this Committee meeting alone, the youth and unique political conditions right now must be capitalized on to maximize change.

I also encourage the Committee to expand the scope of its work beyond just place names and include other names like animals. Many animals that may be significant to marginalized communities have harmful names that do not convey their true history or importance. Some animals I encourage this Committee to begin with are: Cuvier's Goose Beaked Whale, Bobbit Worm, Gypsy Moth, Asian Carp, Eskimo Curlew, Oriental Cockroach, and Townsend's Warbler.

Lastly, I ask that the Committee begin discussions on states that are removing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work from their school curriculums. As we see more and more efforts to eradicate DEI, the efforts of this Committee and the work of many others are in danger. I suggest that the Committee begins to discuss strategies for renaming these locations and the subsequent required education initiatives.

I support the work of this Committee and thank you all for your time, dedication, and readiness. With openness and willingness to learn, challenging our current beliefs, and

listening to the lived experiences and histories of others, this Committee can create the urgently needed and important change to reconcile our nation's horrors of the past.

Thank you,  
Erika Pietrzak