

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

October 22, 2024

Proclaiming November 2024 as Native American Heritage Month

November is nationally recognized as Native American Heritage Month, a time to honor the rich history, diverse cultures, and significant contributions of Native American communities across the United States. This month serves not only as a celebration but also as a vital opportunity for education, reflection, and action. By recognizing their narratives, we bring attention to the rich tapestry of cultural practices, languages, and wisdom that have shaped our nation.

Los Angeles County is home to numerous First Peoples, including the Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash, whose ancestral lands we inhabit, as well as the region’s American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) population, comprised of members from more than 200 tribes. By designating this month, we honor the resilience and creativity of Native Americans who have enriched our society through their art, leadership, and cultural practices.

Recognizing Native American Heritage Month also brings to the forefront the ongoing challenges faced by these communities as identified in the Los Angeles

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City/County Native American Indian Commission “WE ARE STILL HERE”: A Report on Past, Present, and Ongoing Harms Against Local Tribes, including issues related to homelessness, health, and economic mobility. It compels us to engage in meaningful dialogue and act toward addressing these disparities, ensuring that Native voices are heard and valued.

Los Angeles County is committed to promoting equity, inclusion, and reconciliation, and has undertaken initiatives to address past wrongs through meaningful engagement with Native American tribes and communities. Over the past several years, Los Angeles County has worked to integrate Native voices in policymaking, cultural preservation efforts, and educational programs that celebrate Native American heritage.

Throughout this month, the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) also selects three AIAN community members to recognize as honorees. This year’s honorees are Kenny Ramos - Spirit of Creativity, Cynthia Ruiz - Spirit of Community, and Chief Anthony Morales - Spirit of Tradition.

Spirit of Creativity Honoree

Kenny Ramos is an Iipai theater practitioner from the Barona Band of Mission Indians/Kumeyaay Nation. He grew up on the Barona Indian Reservation in San Diego County and graduated from UCLA with a degree in American Indian Studies. He is passionate about making theater that centers Native perspectives, asserts tribal sovereignty, and challenges settler colonial realities of American culture and society.

Kenny is an ensemble member at Cornerstone Theatre Company in Los

Angeles, where his favorite projects include a trilogy of collaborations with Sicangu Lakota playwright Larissa FastHorse, director Michael John Garcés, and various tribal nations and communities around the United States: *Urban Rez* in 2016 (Tovaangar, Los Angeles, CA); *Native Nation* in 2019 (O'odham and Piipash lands, Phoenix, AZ); and *Wicoun* in 2023 (Oceti Sakowin lands, North/South Dakota statewide tour).

Highly active in the contemporary Native theater movement, Kenny's favorite theater credits include the world premiere productions of Mary Kathryn Nagle's *Return to Niobrara* (The Rose, Omaha Theater Company); Dillon Chitto's *Bingo Hall* (Native Voices at the Autry); Vera Starbard's *Devilfish; A Tlingit Christmas Carol*; and Frank Henry Kaash Katasse's *Where the Summit Meets the Stars* (Perseverance Theatre); Madeline Sayet's *The Neverland* (Krannert Center, Illinois Theatre); and the First Peoples Fund's original production, *We the Peoples Before*, at The John F. Kennedy Center.

Other regional credits include productions, workshops, and readings at South Dakota Shakespeare Festival (Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Roderigo in *Othello*), Passage Theatre Company, Playwrights' Center, American Players Theatre, Woolly Mammoth, Denver Center Colorado New Play Summit, Seattle Rep, Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper Forum, and The Kennedy Center. Kenny also voiced the quail spirit, Takak, in the children's animated television series, *Spirit Rangers*, on Netflix.

Kenny is a 2019 Theatre Communications Group (TCG) Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellow; a 2019 First Peoples Fund Cultural Capital Fellow; a Yale Center for the Study of Race, Indigeneity, and Transnational Migration (RITM) 2021

Mellon Artist Fellow; a 2021 Intercultural Leadership Institute Fellow; and a Center for Cultural Innovation 2022 CALI Catalyst Grantee.

Currently, Kenny is touring the country with the national touring company of *Peter Pan: The Broadway Musical*, which recently finished a 3-week run at the Pantages Theater in Hollywood.

Kenny continues to live in his ancestral tribal homelands today, where he's been an Artist-in-Residence at La Jolla Playhouse, serves on the Community Advisory Council at The Old Globe, and is under commission at Diversionary Theatre. He dedicates his successes to his mother, JoAnn, who transitioned on to be with their ancestors this past May.

Spirit of Community Honoree

Cynthia Ruiz is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and the Chairwoman of the Cherokees of Los Angeles (Tsa-La-Gi LA). Cynthia is a distinguished professor, best-selling author, executive coach, and inspirational speaker, renowned for her expertise in leadership. Ms. Ruiz served as a Commissioner on the Board of Water and Power (LADWP) Commission, appointed by Mayor Eric Garcetti and was the first Native American to serve on the body.

Before her role as LADWP Commissioner, Cynthia held the position of Commission President at LACERS (Los Angeles City Employee Retirement System), overseeing a multibillion-dollar pension portfolio. She has authored or co-authored eight books and is a recognized expert in public-sector leadership.

At the University of West Los Angeles (UWLA), Cynthia imparts her extensive knowledge of leadership to both graduate and undergraduate students. Cynthia's

dedication to her Cherokee heritage has been recognized with awards such as the Cherokee Nation “Community Leader of the Year Award” and the Cherokee Phoenix - Seven Feathers Award. She holds a Master of Science Degree in Counseling from California State University Los Angeles and has completed a Leadership Course at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Cynthia Ruiz follows in the footsteps of her mother who served on the LANAIC for 20 years. Cynthia maintains a strong connection to the Native American community in Los Angeles, serving as a dedicated leader and advocate for Native American issues. She mentors numerous individuals within the community, champions critical Native American causes, and plays a pivotal role in organizing and leading Native American events throughout Los Angeles. Cynthia inspires and empowers others through her work. Her mission is to be a beneficial presence on this planet, fostering a world characterized by love, compassion, integrity, and support for future generations.

Spirit of Tradition Honoree

Chief Anthony Morales is the leader of the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians and has led numerous initiatives to support the tribe’s ongoing efforts to reclaim their heritage and ensure their presence is acknowledged. His leadership values traditions from ceremonial duties, involving active engagement in cultural preservation, education, and legal advocacy.

Chief Morales is committed to the preservation and revitalization of the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians' cultural practices and traditions. He has overseen initiatives aimed at maintaining the tribe's language, rituals, and customs, ensuring

these vital aspects of their identity are passed down to future generations. His efforts have included organizing cultural events, educational programs, and community gatherings that celebrate the tribe's rich heritage. Chief Morales has played a crucial role in the tribe's efforts to protect and preserve their ancestral lands. He has been actively involved in various campaigns to safeguard significant cultural and natural sites from development and destruction. Including a trip to the White House in May to see the signing of the Protection of the San Gabriel Mountains.

His leadership is characterized by a commitment to justice, cultural integrity, and environmental sustainability. He continues to inspire his tribe with a vision of resilience and focuses on the youth of the tribe knowing they are needed to continue tribal traditions.

As a cultural bearer, Chief Morales keeps traditional practices, stories, and customs alive within the community. His efforts ensure that invaluable knowledge and wisdom of the Gabrieleno are passed down to future generations, fostering a deep sense of identity and pride among the tribe's members.

Let us celebrate Native American Heritage Month with respect and gratitude, honoring the resilience of Native peoples and working together to build a just society where their rights and cultures are upheld and celebrated.

In a report back requested through Supervisor Solis' motion last year proclaiming Native American Heritage Month, Los Angeles County's Chief Executive Office concluded that the creation of an Office of Tribal Affairs in the Department of Arts and Culture would affirm and strengthen the County's commitment to local Tribes and the AIAN community. The Office would help elevate and increase the visibility of the

LANAIC, not detract from it. However, the necessary funding was not provided to establish and support the Office.

The report back also identified that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles had not been updated since 1980. However, there are several functions the LANAIC, and its staff have been unofficially and informally providing for the City in recent years that are not included in the agreement, including responding to City resolutions in which the body is named, and supporting event coordination for City-directed AIAN events. Los Angeles County also provides all onboarding, including background checks and required commissioner trainings for all fifteen commissioners. The report ultimately found that the County's increased investments and interest in LANAIC, local Tribes, and the AIAN community in recent years may indicate that the MOU should be renegotiated to provide a more equal contribution of resources.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Proclaim November 2024 as "Native American Heritage Month" in Los Angeles County and encourage County Departments and residents to participate in Native American Heritage Month events and programming;
2. Acknowledge and celebrate Kenny Ramos - Spirit of Creativity, Cynthia Ruiz - Spirit of Community, and Chief Anthony Morales - Spirit of Tradition as this year's LANAIC honorees;
3. Adopt the findings from the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission "WE ARE STILL HERE": A Report on Past, Present, and Ongoing Harms Against Local Tribes and further find that extending access to American Indian and Alaska Native community members to key County assets, such as

museums and beaches, from which they historically have been excluded, as a small token of the County's commitment to addressing discrimination against the American Indian and Alaska Native community by the government, serves a direct and substantial public purpose;

4. Direct the Natural History Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Department of Beaches and Harbors, and other relevant Departments to, in coordination with the Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative, provide free access for one day on or about, and in celebration of, Native American Heritage Month, to appropriate facilities (such as museums and beach parking) for American Indian and Alaska Native community members; and
5. Direct the Chief Executive Office and the Department of Arts and Culture to determine the feasibility of funding a new Office of Tribal Affairs and include funding in the FY2025-26 Budget.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Arts and Culture to work with the Chief Executive Office and County Counsel to initiate renegotiation of the MOU between the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles establishing the LANAIC with the goals of:

- a. Increasing parity of committed resources by the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles; and
- b. Updating and clarifying roles and responsibilities of the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles in the operations of the LANAIC.

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