

# Native American Rights Fund

## Indigenous Peoples' Rights

<https://www.narf.org/cases/graduation/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

Native graduates should be able to celebrate their successes without sacrificing their tribal identity.

Status: Active

**NARF has a long history of assisting students who are prohibited from wearing eagle feathers at graduation ceremonies due to narrow graduation dress codes. We continue to advocate for these graduates so they can celebrate their great successes without sacrificing their tribal identity. Students and advocates looking to change narrow graduation dress codes can find resources below.**

Many Native communities consider eagles to be spiritually significant. They believe that, as eagles roam the sky, they have a special connection with God. Their feathers represent honesty, truth, majesty, strength, courage, wisdom, power, and freedom. The United States government has long recognized the importance of eagles for Native religious and spiritual beliefs. In these communities, eagle feathers are given to individuals to mark and honor significant life accomplishments, such as graduation.

Every spring, Native American students from across the country contact NARF because they are being prohibited from wearing eagle feathers at graduation ceremonies. Once schools come to understand the religious, cultural, and academic significance of eagle feathers, most make accommodations and exceptions for Native American students.

Unfortunately, a handful of school districts persist in restricting Native American religious liberty and viewpoints. This singling out of Native students puts them in the position of having to choose between participating in the celebration of a great accomplishment with their classmates or following their Native religious and cultural traditions.

The Tribal Education Department National Assembly (TEDNA) and NARF are proud to distribute two flyers to assist students and families in their quests to wear eagle feathers at their graduation ceremonies. [Wearing Eagle Feathers at Graduation: A Guide for Students and Families](#) serves to provide guidance on how to work with school districts to make the request. [Wearing Eagle Feathers at Graduation: Information for Schools](#) teaches schools about the significance eagle feathers and plumes hold for graduating students.

The U.S. Constitution's Free Exercise Clause protects religious practices and recognizes the exercise of religion as an unalienable right. The Free Speech Clause of the Constitution also protects the right to free speech. Wearing an eagle feather or regalia to show academic success and religious beliefs should be considered protected practices, and Native students should not be singled out for unique treatment.

The federal government has long considered eagle feathers religious objects. In 1994, the White House issued a [Policy Concerning Distribution of Eagle Feathers for Native American Religious Purposes](#).

[NCAI Resolution #SD-15-006](#)

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