



AGENDA & NOTICE

LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY
NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026, 6:30 PM

Meeting Location: County of Los Angeles Hall of Administration
Sybil Brand Room 372
500 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

To Listen Via Telephone: 669 444 9171
Webinar ID: 814 2163 6462
Webinar Passcode: 917562

To View Via Web:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81421636462?pwd=OhfbkqvtsyEcFgHfZcAxDYykdKv1Zo.1>

To Provide Public Comment: You may submit written public comment via email to contact@lanaic.lacounty.gov. Please note "LANAIC Public Comment" in the subject line. Please submit your public comment or documentation as soon as possible, but no later than 5 p.m. the night before the scheduled meeting. Public comment received after this time will be added to the next regular Commission meeting.

MARK VILLASEÑOR, Chairperson
Fernandeño Tataviam

BRYCE LEWIS-SMITH, Vice Chairperson
Citizen Potawatomi Nation

CAROLINE BHALLA, Secretary
Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin

RENE' WILLIAMS, Treasurer
Colville Tribes

DENISE ESCOTO, Commissioner
Northern Cheyenne

CHRISIE CASTRO, Commissioner
Navajo

ANDREA N. GARCIA, M.D., Commissioner
Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara

VIVIAN GARCIA, Commissioner
Cherokee

SHAWN IMITATES DOG, Commissioner
Lakota

DAWN JACKSON, Commissioner
Saginaw Chippewa

MONA MORALES RECALDE, Commissioner
Gabrieleno Tongva

JOHN ONLY A CHIEF, Commissioner
Pawnee Nation

RUDY ORTEGA JR., Commissioner
Fernandeño Tataviam

TED TENORIO, Commissioner
Tiguan Nation

RICH TOYON, Commissioner
Acjachemen

ALEXANDRA VALDES
Executive Director
Tlingit/Athabaskan

-
1. CALL TO ORDER
 2. INVOCATION & LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT
 3. ROLL CALL
 4. COMMISSIONER INTRODUCTIONS
 5. PUBLIC COMMENT

6. ACTION ITEMS

- 6.1. Adopt Absentee Excuses
- 6.2. Adopt the November 18, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) Unapproved Meeting Minutes
- 6.3. Establish the LANAIC 50th Anniversary Planning Ad Hoc Committee

7. DISCUSSION ITEMS

- 7.1 Discuss AIAN Homelessness in LA County
- 7.2 Discuss Impacts of Federal Administration on LA County's AIAN Community
- 7.3 Discuss Draft FY26-27 Budget Request Letters

8. PRESENTATIONS

- 8.1 *Introduction to LA County Retained Tribal Indian Law Experts* - David Montoya and Jana Simmons
- 8.2 *Introductory Presentation* - LA County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone

9. CHAIR'S REPORT

- 9.1 General Updates
- 9.2 LANAIC 50th Anniversary Celebration

10. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

- 10.1 General Updates

11. COMMITTEE & AD-HOC COMMITTEE REPORTS

- 11.1 Executive Committee
- 11.2 Self Governance Board

12. COMMISSIONER GENERAL COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

13. ANNOUNCEMENTS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

14. COMMISSION ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: Tuesday, March 17, 2026, from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm
Location: Hall of Administration, Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, LA, CA 90012

AGENDA FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026, 6:30 PM

Meetings are held in English. If interpretation in other languages or accommodations for persons with disabilities are needed, please contact the Commission at 213-738-3241 at least 3 business days before the meeting. The meetings of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission are accessible to persons with disabilities.

Contact: www.lanaic.lacounty.gov, contact@lanaic.lacounty.gov, or (213) 738-3241

Approved:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Villasenor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chairperson Mark Villasenor



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025**

The November 18, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian (LANAIC) meeting was at the County of Los Angeles Hall of Administration, Sybil Brand Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012.

Call to Order & Land Acknowledgement

Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog called the meeting to order at 6:32 P.M. and read the Los Angeles County Land Acknowledgment.

Invocation

Commissioner Rudy Ortega Jr. provided an invocation.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog
 Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor
 Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith
 Chrissie Castro (Remote – Just Cause)
 Caroline Bhalla
 Dr. Andrea Garcia
 Vivian Garcia
 Dawn Jackson (Remote – Just Cause)
 Mona Morales Recalde
 John Only A Chief (Departed at 7:08 PM)
 Rudy Ortega Jr.
 Ted Tenorio (Joined after Item 6.2)
 Rich Toyon (Joined after Item 6.2)
 Rene' William

Absent: Treasurer Denise Escoto (Excused)

Staff: Alexandra Valdes, LANAIC Executive Director
 Megan Moret, Department of Arts & Culture Board Liaison and Special Assistant

Quorum was met.

Commissioner Introductions

Commissioners provided brief introductions, including their names, appointing office, and tribal affiliation.



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Public Comment

Charles Golding, a UCLA Master of Public Policy Student, introduced himself to the Commission and shared the focus of his studies.

Action Items

6.1 Adopt absentee excuses

A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor and seconded by Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia for Treasurer Denise Escoto’s absentee excuses for the November 18, 2025, meeting.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, John Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., and Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto, Castro, Tenorio, Toyon

6.2 Approve the October 21, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) Unapproved Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Villasenor and seconded by Commissioner Dr. Garcia to approve the unapproved October 21, 2025, LANAIC Meeting Minutes as presented.

The motion passed.

YES	Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	Imitates Dog
ABSENT	Escoto, Castro, Tenorio, Toyon



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025**

6.3. Select CY2026-27 LANAIC Executive Committee

Roll-call votes were taken for the CY2026-27 LANAIC Executive Committee (vote breakdown below). Mark Villasenor was selected as Chairperson, Bryce Lewis-Smith was selected as Vice Chairperson, Rene’ Williams was selected as Treasurer, and Caroline Bhalla was selected as Secretary.

2026-2027 Chairperson				
	Mark Villasenor	Andrea Garcia	Bryce Lewis-Smith	Absent
Imitates Dog	X			
Villasenor	X			
Lewis-Smith	X			
Denise Escoto				X
Bhalla		X		
Castro		X		
V. Garcia		X		
A. Garcia		X		
Jackson	X			
Morales	X			
Recalde				
Only A Chief	X			
Ortega Jr.	X			
Tenorio	X			
Toyon	X			
Williams		X		



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UNAPPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2025**

CY2026-27 Vice Chairperson				
	Mark Villasenor	Bryce Lewis-Smith	Mona Morales Recalde	Absent
Imitates Dog		X		
Villasenor		X		
Lewis-Smith			X	
Denise Escoto				X
Bhalla		X		
Castro		X		
V. Garcia		X		
A. Garcia		X		
Jackson		X		
Morales Recalde		X		
Only A Chief			X	
Ortega Jr.			X	
Tenorio		X		
Toyon			X	
Williams		X		

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CY2026-27 Treasurer					
	Rene' Williams	Denise Escoto	Vivian Garcia	Mona Morales Recalde	Absent
Imitates Dog			X		
Villasenor				X	
Lewis-Smith				X	
Denise Escoto					X
Bhalla	X				
Castro	X				
A. Garcia	X				
V. Garcia			X		
Jackson	X				
Morales Recalde			X		
Only A Chief			X		
Ortega Jr.			X		
Tenorio				X	
Toyon	X				
Williams	X				



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CY2026-27 Secretary		
	Caroline Bhalla	Absent
Imitates Dog	X	
Villasenor	X	
Lewis-Smith	X	
Denise Escoto		X
Bhalla	X	
Castro	X	
V. Garcia	X	
A. Garcia	X	
Jackson	X	
Morales Recalde	X	
Only A Chief	X	
Ortega Jr.	X	
Tenorio	X	
Toyon	X	
Williams	X	

6.4. Adopt the draft LA City/County Native American Indian Commission FY24-25 Annual Report.

A motion was made by Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor and seconded by Commissioner Caroline Bhalla to adopt the draft LA City/County Native American Indian Commission FY24-25 Annual Report.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Tenorio, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
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6.5. Adopt the Draft Letter to LA City Mayor Karen Bass Encouraging her Appointment of a Native American leader to the LADWP Board Vacancy

A motion was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Vice Chair Villasenor to adopt the draft letter to LA City Mayor Karen Bass, encouraging her appointment of a Native American leader to the LADWP Board vacancy.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Tenorio, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto

6.6. Reappoint Commissioner Rene’ Williams to Serve on the LA Continuum of Care (LA CoC) Board

A motion was made by Commissioner Rene’ Williams and seconded by Vice Chair Villasenor to reappoint Commissioner Rene’ Williams to serve on the LA Continuum of Care (LA CoC) Board.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Tenorio, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto



**LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION
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6.7. Adopt the Draft Letters to LA County Board of Supervisors and Mayor Karen Bass Uplifting AIAN Community Housing and Homelessness Needs

A motion was made by Vice Chair Villasenor and seconded by Commissioner Bhalla to adopt the draft letters to the LA County Board of Supervisors and Mayor Karen Bass, Uplifting AIAN community housing and homelessness needs.

The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Tenorio, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto

6.8. Approve the Co-branding of the LA County AIAN Homelessness Dashboard Release Materials, including a Quote from Chair Shawn Imitates Dog.

A motion was made by Commissioner Williams and seconded by Commissioner Morales Recalde to approve the co-branding of the LA County AIAN Homelessness Dashboard Release materials, including a quote from Chair Shawn Imitates Dog. The motion passed.

YES	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Lewis-Smith, Bhalla, A. Garcia, V. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Ortega Jr., Tenorio, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Escoto

Discussion Items

7.1 Discuss AIAN Homelessness in LA County

7.2 Discuss Impacts of Federal Administration on LA County’s AIAN Community

The LANAIC had a broad discussion on the impact of the federal administration on LA County’s AIAN community and on SNAP during the government shutdown.



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7.3 Discuss LA City Parks Needs Assessment Steering Committee Updates

Rich provided a brief update about the LA City Parks Needs Assessment Steering Committee. He shared that since the Needs Assessment was completed, the Steering Committee will no longer be meeting.

7.4 Debrief 2025 Native American Heritage Month Events at LA City Hall

2025 Native American Heritage Month Ad Hoc Committee Chair Bryce Lewis-Smith provided a recap of the events at LA City Hall on Friday, November 7, 2025. He shared that the events were well received by the community and a success. He extended gratitude to the Ad Hoc Committee Chair for all their work. LANAIC Chair Imitates Dog extended gratitude to Commissioner Lewis-Smith and Alexandra Valdes for their support with his Council Chambers remarks and noted that the focus on Indigenous fire practices and co-stewardship was very well received by City Councilmembers. Alexandra shared that Commissioner Dawn Jackson had truly outdone herself with this year's curation of the NAHM Bridge Gallery.

7.5 Discuss FY26-27 LANAIC Budget Priorities

The LANAIC discussed possible items to include in a future FY26-27 budget request letter to the LA County Board of Supervisors and LA City Mayor Karen Bass. The following items were discussed:

- Any items from previous requests that have not been funded.
- An AIAN Coordinator position at the newly formed County of LA Department of Homelessness and Housing Services.
- A Director Level position at the newly formed County of LA Department of Homelessness and Housing Services.
- The Creation of a Tribal Relations Office.
- The development of a First Right of Refusal Policy.
- The development of a Land Return Policy.
- Support for Local Tribes impacted by changes made to the Native American Heritage Commission Contact List.
- The development of relevant educational resources for County employees.
- Funding to support commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the LANAIC in 2026.



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Chair's Report

8.1 General Updates

Chair Imitates Dog noted it was his last meeting as Chair of LANAIC and offered a reflection on his experience as Chair over the past two years.

Executive Director's Report

9.1 General Updates

Alexandra reflected on the accomplishments of the LANAIC in 2025 and thanked the commissioners for their steadfast commitment to the community amid unprecedented times and circumstances.

Committee & Ad Hoc Committee Reports

10.1 Executive Committee

No report was provided.

10.2 Self Governance Board

No report was provided.

10.3 2025 Native American Heritage Month Ad Hoc Committee

No report was provided. Alexandra Valdes noted that this Committee is scheduled to sunset on November 30, 2025.

10.4 LANAIC Bylaws Ad Hoc Committee

Vice Chair Mark Villasenor sunset the LANAIC Bylaws Ad Hoc Committee

Commissioner General Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Commissioner Ted Tenorio proposed that the LANAIC participate in a project he is working on to commemorate the Semiquincentennial of the United States. He shared that Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde is working on a proposal on behalf of her tribe to America250.

Announcements/Future Agenda Items

Commissioner John Only A Chief shared 3 announcements. He shared that he attended the Hard Rock Tejon Casino grand opening and that it was a very nice event. He alerted the LANAIC of two upcoming pow wows: Cal State University Northridge (November 29 and 30) and Indio (November 29 and 30). Finally, he shared about the upcoming Burial of the Unclaimed Dead. He shared that LA County hosts this ceremony each year and that he has gone in the



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past, and does not like the Native American representation that has been included. He shared that he thinks that it should be a tribal leader from a local tribe, such as Chairman Anthony Morales.

Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde shared that her tribe, the Gabrieleno Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, is hosting a Native Market on December 6 at their tribal offices.

Commission Adjournment

Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog announced that the next LANAIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 6:30 p.m. in the Hall of Administration, Room 372, located at 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 P.M.

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LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION

Chairperson
MARK VILLASEÑOR
Fernandeño Tataviam

Vice Chairperson
BRYCE LEWIS-SMITH
Citizen Potawatomi Nation

Secretary
CAROLINE BHALLA
Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin

Treasurer
RENE' WILLIAMS
Colville Tribes

CHRISSIE CASTRO
Navajo

DENISE ESCOTO
Northern Cheyenne

ANDREA N. GARCIA, M.D.
Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara

VIVIAN GARCIA
Cherokee

SHAWN IMITATES-DOG
Lakota

DAWN JACKSON
Saginaw Chippewa

MONA MORALES RECALDE
Gabrieleno Tongva

JOHN ONLY A CHIEF
Pawnee Nation

RUDY ORTEGA JR.
Fernandeño Tataviam

TED TENORIO
Tiguan Nation

RICH TOYON
Achachemen

ALEXANDRA VALDES
Executive Director

February 17, 2026

LA County Board of Supervisors
500 W Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Board of Supervisors,

I am sending this budget request letter on behalf of the Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (Commission). We appreciate the opportunity to formalize our budget requests for the County of Los Angeles' FY26-27 budget.

At the May 18, 2021 commission meeting, the body adopted a resolution recommending that the County create an Office of Tribal Affairs. The need for this type of office has been uplifted by local tribal leaders and members of the American Indian and Alaska Native community in numerous County-led processes. The Commission has advocated to your Board in previous budget request letters to fund this critical office. This item was also included in the Department of Arts and Culture's FY25-26 and FY26-27 Departmental Budget Requests. Unfortunately, funding has not been allocated, and the Commission is once more respectfully requesting that the Board allocate funding to establish the Office.

On September 20, 2023, the Commission transmitted letters to your Board requesting a sustainability plan to build on the great work of the "Identifying, Supporting, and Serving American Indians and Alaska Natives Who Are at Risk of or Experiencing Homelessness" Board Motion (October 2019). The Commission also uplifted this request in our FY24-25 and FY25-26 budget request letters. Unfortunately, this critical work remains unfunded. We respectfully request that your Board support funding in the FY26-27 budget for a dedicated AIAN Coordinator position within the newly established Department of Homeless Services and Housing, as well as a senior executive position to ensure the County is coordinated in its response to AIAN housing and homelessness. The positions that we are advocating for could be under the "Equity and Cultural Care" branch of the Department of Homeless Services and Housing's organizational chart.

At the May 21, 2024 Commission meeting, the Commission unanimously adopted a letter requesting that the Department of Arts and Culture allocate funding and qualified resources to support the development of a new website for the LANAIC. The Commission's website is a key communication tool with the AIAN community and public, plays a pivotal role in disseminating information, sharing County and Commission services and events, and

LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION [2]

highlighting Commission accomplishments. The outdated design and functionality of our current website hinder our ability to communicate with and engage AIAN community members effectively. A request for funding to support the development of a new website was included in our FY25-26 budget request letter and was not met. We are requesting again that the Board allocate funding for the Commission to develop a new website.

At the direction of the Board in 2021, we collaborated with the Department of Human Resources to develop a 2-part *DIAlogue* event focused on building awareness and understanding of the AIAN population among the County workforce. While these webinars were highly attended and effective, we believe a Countywide-mandated training focused on building the County's workforce's understanding of the unique history and issues facing AIAN people in Los Angeles would have a far greater impact. We request that the Board allocate funding and direct the CEO to procure the training. This request was also included in our FY25-26 budget request letter.

Finally, while some of the recommendations in the *We are Still Here* report have been funded, many remain unaddressed. We respectfully request that your Board dedicate support and resources to developing a First Right of Refusal Policy and a Land Return Policy.

Thank you for considering the Commission's FY26-27 budget requests.

Sincerely,

LANAIC Chair Mark Villaseñor



Jana M. Simmons

Partner

801 South Figueroa Street
 Suite 2100
 Los Angeles, CA 90017
 jana.simmons@ropers.com
 d (415) 972-6329
 m (989) 274-4470

Jana focuses her practice on federal Indian law and tribal law and defends tribal and non-tribal governments and businesses in complex civil litigation. Among her work in Indian Country, Jana assists tribal governments by creating and consulting on existing and future ordinances and regulations, advising on internal governance and external government-to-government relations, conducting independent investigations involving internal complaints and violations of tribal law, preparing advisory opinions to protect tribal governments and businesses, and providing legal representation in federal, state, and tribal courts.

Jana leverages an extensive background as a civil defense litigator, successfully representing tribal and non-tribal governments and businesses in complex civil litigation in matters ranging from general liability

PRACTICE AREAS

Cannabis
 Insurance Services
 Native American Law
 Product Liability & Torts

ACCOLADES

State of Michigan Resolution Honoring Jana Simmons, 2021
 Appointed to Board of Counseling by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, 2014, 2018
 Northern Michigan University's Distinguished Alumni Award, 2016
 Judge, Native American Law Students Association (NALSA), 2013
 Michigan Defense Trial Counsel Distinguished Service Award, 2011
 Michigan Super Lawyers Rising Star, 2009-2010
 Recognized by International Masters of Gaming Law

COURT ADMISSIONS

California
 Michigan
 Supreme Court of the United States

and product liability to construction and environmental. She is often called upon by tribal and non-tribal clients for her opinions and advice on building successful business relationships and economic development in Indian Country, as well as questions about the impacts of tribal law, sovereignty, and jurisdiction.

Jana has strong experience with tribal governance, including enrollment, elections, cannabis, and economic development. She has successfully litigated critical cases involving the interpretation of tribal constitutions and issues involving separation of powers in tribal courts.

Jana also has extensive experience acting as national coordinating counsel, including strategically managing legal defenses across multiple jurisdictions, ensuring consistent application of legal strategies, and overseeing a network of local defense counsel involved in complex civil litigation. She works closely with tribes and their insurance companies to strategically pursue defenses and protect tribal interests.

Jana attained, with honors, a Master of Jurisprudence in Federal Indian Law degree from the University of Tulsa College of Law in December 2018.

Representative Matters

Tribal & Native American Law

- Successfully represented a family faced with disenrollment by a tribe on allegations of "mistake of fact" and invoking questions of constitutional

USDC: Central District of California

USDC: Eastern District of Michigan

USDC: Western District of Michigan

Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

Gun Lake Tribe Tribal Court

Las Vegas Paiute Tribal Court

Little River Band of Ottawa Indians Tribal Court

Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi Tribal Court

Oneida Nation Tribal Court

Saginaw Chippewa Tribal Court

Hualapai Tribal Court

Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribal Court

Intertribal Court of Southern California

Intertribal Court of Northern California (pending)

EDUCATION

MJIL, University of Tulsa College of Law, 2018

JD, Roger Williams University School of Law, 1998

BA, Northern Michigan University, 1993

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Leader, Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association (ICIA) Partnership, 2023

Member, American Indian Law Committee, State Bar of Michigan

Member, American Indian Law Section, State Bar of Michigan

Member, Claims and Litigation Management Alliance (CLM)

Member, Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association

Member, National Native American Bar Association

Member, Southern California Tribal Bar Association

Past Chairperson and Founder, Native Nations Law Task Force, The Voice of the Defense Bar, Defense Research Institute (DRI)

Former Chairperson, Disciplinary Subcommittee, Michigan Board of Counseling

Former Board of Editors, Michigan Lawyers Weekly

interpretation and tribal Court jurisdiction over enrollment matters. Successfully secured the re-enrollment of members as well as "back benefits" accumulated during the pendency of the disenrollment.

Member, Philanthropic Activities Committee, Defense Research Institute (DRI), 2019-2020

Advisory Board Member, National Native American Cannabis Association, 2019

Advisory Board Member, Native American Editorial Advisory Board, Law360, 2019

- Successful representation and favorable resolution for an attorney sued by the attorney's former tribal client in a tribal court in Oklahoma and alleging legal malpractice involving tribal lending business.
- Successfully represented and won a case of first impression involving land assignment claims for a tribal family in tribal court in California.
- Secured early dismissal in a tribal court in Kansas of a tribal casino based on tribal sovereign immunity and statute of limitations under tribal law, where the plaintiff argued that the tribe's gaming compact applied state tort claim law and permitted a longer statute of limitations period.
- Secured early dismissal in the 10th Circuit District Court against a tribe based on tribal exhaustion, where plaintiff alleged wrongful conduct by the tribe's police and argued that state statutes applied to the tribe acting off-reservation.
- Secured judgment on the pleadings in the 6th Circuit of a tribal college against a plaintiff's allegations of violation of federal law based on "arm of the tribe" analysis in favor of tribal sovereign immunity for the college.
- Extensive experience with drafting and analyzing tribal ordinances related to the legalization of medical and recreational marijuana and the regulation of cannabis on tribal land.
- Extensive experience with drafting and analyzing tribal ordinances related to tribal elections and enrollment.
- Created and presented full video training for tribal officials, executives, and employees on anti-harassment protocol in the workplace under various laws, including tribal law.
- Successfully won a lawsuit pending in a tribal court for an adopted Native American child who was rejected for enrollment with his adoptive father's tribe following the tribal council's

amendment of enrollment criteria. The tribal court issued an order in favor of the enrollment of the child.

- Served as legal counsel for a tribal council in a lawsuit pending in tribal court involving a matter of first impression involving the powers of the tribal council versus a tribal chairman under the tribal constitution. The lawsuit was won, and the tribal court issued a precedential opinion in favor of the tribal council.
- Successfully resolved a dispute pending in a tribal court between a tribal member(s) and a tribal election board, where it was alleged that the election board did not follow proper procedure. The lawsuit was dismissed, and fees collected by the election board were returned to the tribal member(s).
- Successfully resolved claims by an elected tribal official concerning a tribal health plan and retirement benefits and coordinated with a tribal insurance company to negotiate a reasonable settlement before the lawsuit was filed in a tribal court.
- Successfully resolved claims by a tribal employee seeking work-related injuries against the tribe and the tribe's insurance company.
- Secured a nominal settlement and avoided protracted litigation involving the tribal employee, the tribe, and the tribe's insurance company.
- Extensive experience with internal tribal investigations involving harassment and other sensitive employment matters, reporting, and recommendations for the protection of tribal businesses and governments.
- Expert consultation on tribal sovereignty and jurisdiction with a Chicago-based law firm on insurance policy with tribal insured and anticipated coverage disputes.
- Presently providing expert consultation with a California-based firm on matters involving a contract between a non-tribal entity and a tribe and indemnification issues in a personal injury lawsuit.
- Expert consultation with a Michigan-based bank on building relationships with tribes and contract provisions involving matters of tribal sovereign immunity, choice of law, and jurisdiction.

Business & Commercial

- Secured early dismissal of our client, an independent investigator, from a federal court case in California involving allegations of constitutional violations, negligence, defamation, and conspiracy against several defendants. The 300-plus-page complaint, brought by an aggressive plaintiff's law firm, was complex and sought significant damages resulting from the alleged defamation and termination of a teacher in a prominent school district. From the start, we maintained a strong defense position for our client and successfully persuaded opposing counsel to dismiss our client before the motion stage.
- Successfully prepared and presented pre-trial motions in California mass tort product liability litigation, resulting in a favorable settlement for the client in advance of trial.
- Successfully defended and resolved malpractice claims pending in a tribal court against a former attorney practicing outside of tribal land in state court and involving a tribal lending business conducted outside of tribal land.
- Secured summary disposition in favor of a defendant bar and then secured a favorable appellate opinion on remand from the Michigan Supreme Court in a dram shop lawsuit where the plaintiff suffered catastrophic injuries when the alleged intoxicated defendant rear-ended the stopped plaintiff driver on a highway. The successful defense focused on no proof of service to a visibly intoxicated person as required under Michigan law, even though the plaintiff's expert opined, after the fact, that the alleged intoxicated driver must have appeared intoxicated when served.
- Despite plaintiffs' eight-figure settlement demand, successfully resolved a lawsuit involving mobile home fire and burn victims in Michigan by pressing no causation, comparative fault, and no duty defenses and challenging the reliability of the plaintiffs' experts' opinions. The resulting settlement was a small fraction of the plaintiffs' demand.
- Secured dismissal in Michigan federal court against a California financial company whose employees committed fraud on clients, seeking coverage and extensive damages for alleged "bad faith" against its insurer, where the policy required that the parties first mediate disputes and then wait 180 days before pursuing litigation.
- Successfully argued as amicus curiae counsel on behalf of the Michigan Association of Counties and established Michigan case law precedent in favor of counties. This issue of first impression involved the inherent power of courts and fixing attorneys' fees payable by counties to attorneys retained by courts to sue counties for funding.

- Earned an award of summary disposition for a worldwide pump manufacturer, advancing sophisticated user and proximate causation defenses, among others. This complex product liability lawsuit in Michigan advanced theories of design defect, failure to warn, fraud, and misrepresentation against the manufacturer in conjunction with work-related burn injuries involving a pulp and chemical explosion at a paper mill.
- Successfully defended a matter at the trial and appellate level related to environmental remediation subcontractors involved in a six-year cleanup of the Pine River adjacent to an abandoned chemical plant in St. Louis, Michigan. Successful briefing and oral argument resulted in the dismissal of the plaintiffs' claims before the Michigan appellate courts and the United States Supreme Court.
- Successfully resolved claims against a subcontractor at an abandoned building in Detroit, Michigan, where the plaintiff suffered severe injuries after falling down an elevator shaft. The settlement reached was far below the case evaluation award.

Cannabis

- Representation and consulting with tribal cannabis regulatory bodies and related businesses to create tribal product liability and gram shop ordinances.
- Serving as legal counsel for tribes and their cannabis regulatory commissions, including drafting ordinance language and amendments, contract negotiations with third-party vendors, representing a client in regulatory and administrative hearings involving licenses, ordinance violations, etc., and assisting the client with interfacing with federal, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies and legislators.
- Successfully litigated and defended a security guard company at a marijuana dispensary involved in a shooting incident with a patron.
- Served as legal counsel for a tribal regulatory commission in contract negotiations involving the creation and structure of tribal cannabis operations.
- Developed and presented a roadmap for creating tribal treaty rights and inter-tribal trade to tribal leadership.
- Consulting with cannabis businesses on employment practices, policies, and accepted industry regulations.

Articles

Tribal Member's Case Could Reshape How Public Law 280 Applies to Cannabis Rights

Tribal Business News

November 08, 2025

Jana M. Simmons provided insight into the potential implications of the Thompson case in a recent *Tribal Business News* article

Recent Developments in Cannabis Law

ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Law Journal

September 27, 2023

Jana Simmons authored an article for the American Bar Association's TIPS Law Journal

Speaking Engagements

Jana M. Simmons Shared Insights on Tribal Joint Ventures and Foreign Trade Zones at Indigenous Biz Con 2025

October 14, 2025

The panel examined how tribes can unlock new economic opportunities through underutilized strategies, while also exploring sovereignty, equity, and ownership models that protect tribal interests

Jana M. Simmons Provided Insight on Foreign Trade Zones at IBG's Wisconsin Contractor Connection

August 29, 2025

Jana's presentation highlighted how FTZs offer Native Nations a powerful tool to advance economic sovereignty, reduce costs for imported goods, and build infrastructure that supports local jobs and enterprise growth

Jana M. Simmons Spoke on Protecting Tribal Assets at the 10th Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference

June 11, 2025

The panel discussed best practices in securing capital, building banking partnerships, and leveraging cannabis revenues to promote sustainable tribal economic growth

Jana M. Simmons Joined a Panel on Tribal Cannabis Regulatory Development at the 10th Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference

June 10, 2025

The session explored the dynamic evolution of tribal cannabis regulation over the past decade, highlighting the shift from prohibition-focused policies to frameworks centered on consumer safety, public health, and community empowerment

Jana M. Simmons Led ICIA's Webinar on Tribal Sovereignty and the Round Valley Raids

May 19, 2025

During the session, Jana discussed the federal lawsuit filed by the Round Valley Indian Tribes (RVIT) against the Mendocino and Humboldt County Sheriffs and the California Highway Patrol

Jana M. Simmons Was a Panelist at the 2025 Wisconsin Cannabis Industry & Policy Summit

March 05, 2025

Jana's panel, Legislative Updates: Shaping the Future of Cannabis Policy in Wisconsin, shared insights on the unique legal and business challenges within the tribal cannabis and hemp industries, highlighting key opportunities for growth and collaboration

Jana M. Simmons Moderated a Panel for the Ninth Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference: State of Cannabis and Hemp Industries in 2024

June 19, 2024

Jana facilitated a discussion on the current regulatory updates in cannabis and hemp

Jana M. Simmons Spoke on a Panel for the Ninth Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference: Cannabis and Hemp Industries Legislative Update for 2024-2025

June 19, 2024

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons spoke on the evolving legislative landscape in cannabis and hemp

Jana M. Simmons Was Proud to Participate in the ICIA 2024 Wisconsin Cannabis Industry & Policy Summit

March 06, 2024

Jana joined the panel, "Policy & Regulatory Framework: From Public Health & Consumer Safety to Banking, Finance & Technology"

The Intersection of Tribal Law and Cannabis

Midwest Hemp Council

March 16, 2023

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons joined Midwest Hemp Council for a podcast examining the intersection of tribal law and cannabis

Events

Jana M. Simmons Attended the AMERIND Tribal Risk & Insurance Convening

August 27, 2025

This event provided a valuable opportunity to connect with tribal professionals and thought leaders through in-depth sessions that strengthen tribal nations, enterprises, and communities

Ropers Majeski Sponsored the 10th Native American Cannabis and Hemp Conference

June 25, 2025

Our Partners, Jana M. Simmons, Stephan Choo, and Spiros E. Fousekis, joined industry experts, tribal leaders, and decision-makers in Temecula, CA, to explore the evolving legal landscape of the cannabis and hemp sectors

Ropers Majeski Sponsored ICIA's Masters of the Green Golf Fundraiser

May 12, 2025

Partner Jana M. Simmons participated in ICIA's first annual fundraising golf tournament, which supported the protection of tribal self-determination and sovereignty in plant medicine

Jana M. Simmons Attended the 2025 Reservation Economic Summit

March 19, 2025

Hosted by The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development, this multifaceted annual event is Indian Country's largest economic development gathering

Ropers Majeski Was a Proud Sponsor of the 2025 Wisconsin Cannabis Industry & Policy Summit

February 28, 2025

This transformative event brought together cannabis advocates, tribal nations, entrepreneurs, policy experts, and community members to amplify understanding and access to plant medicine

Jana M. Simmons and Ropers Majeski Were Proud to Sponsor the ICIA National Indigenous Cannabis Policy & Advocacy Summit

November 19, 2024

Jana participated in a panel, "The Landscape of International Trade and Commerce in Cannabis," which provided insights on global market trends, regulatory challenges, sovereignty, and opportunities for businesses looking to expand across borders

Jana M. Simmons and Ropers Majeski Were Proud to Sponsor the 19th Annual Protecting Tribal Families Golf Fundraiser

April 29, 2024

Since 2004, this event has raised more than \$600,000 to assist Native American organizations

Jana M. Simmons and Kalisha M. Crawford Were Proud to Participate in the 2024 Reservation Economic Summit

March 15, 2024

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons was joined at the event by Director of Marketing & Business Development Kalisha M. Crawford

Jana M. Simmons and Ropers Majeski Were Proud to Sponsor the ICIA National Indigenous Cannabis Policy Summit

November 06, 2023

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons presented "Cannabis on Our Lands: Protecting Research and Intellectual Property in Cannabis"

Ropers Majeski and Jana M. Simmons Were Proud to Participate in the 2023 Combined Claims Conference

August 17, 2023

Jana M. Simmons presented at the conference

Ropers Majeski Was a Proud Sponsor of Native Nation Events Eighth Native American Cannabis & Hemp Conference

Native Nation Events

June 09, 2023

Jana M. Simmons moderated a panel at the conference

Ropers Majeski Was Proud to Be a Part of the Reservation Economic Summit 2023

The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development

April 07, 2023

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons attended the Summit

News

Ropers Majeski Incredibly Honored to Receive the 2023 Indigenous Cannabis Industry Association Business Ally of the Year Award

November 10, 2023

Ropers Partner Jana M. Simmons proudly accepted the award on behalf of the firm

Ropers Majeski Partner Jana M. Simmons Reappointed to American Indian Law Section of the State Bar of Michigan

October 05, 2023

Ropers Majeski congratulates Jana M. Simmons for this achievement

Tribal Civil Jurisdiction Over Non-Tribal Companies: Right of Exclusion Sets the Stage

February 22, 2023

Ropers Majeski Partner Jana M. Simmons provides an overview of tribal exclusion and emerging federal case law upholding tribal civil jurisdiction over non-tribal companies

Five Key Takeaways from the State Bar of Michigan Cannabis Law Conference: Potential Impacts on Tribal Cannabis Businesses

October 24, 2022

Ropers Majeski Partner Jana M. Simmons discusses the important takeaways from the conference

Ropers Majeski Partner Jana M. Simmons Appointed to the American Indian Law Section for the State Bar of Michigan

October 05, 2022

Ropers Majeski congratulates Partner Jana M. Simmons on her appointment



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Introductory Letter

Dear Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission,

As one of the new federal Indian law consultants working for the Los Angeles County Counsel's Office, I look forward to meeting with all of you, in person, during your January 20th meeting.

In preparation of that meeting, I am sharing some of my relevant background and professional experiences with you:

Education

- UCLA School of Law, Juris Doctorate (2009)
- UCLA, Masters in American Indian Studies (2009)
- UC Irvine, B.A. in Political Science (2005)

Current Professional Experiences

- Appellate Court Justice, Northern California Tribal Court Coalition
- Outside Legal Counsel for: Cedarville Rancheria, Torres Martinez Gaming Commission
- Employment Law and Tribal Consultation instructor for The Falmouth Institute
- Professor of Native American Studies at College of the Desert

These experiences are merely an introduction, and I look forward to sharing much more with you and collaborating on important projects. Thank you, and I will see you on January 20th, 2026.

Best,

David J. Montoya III, Esq.
Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo