



The Office of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribal Council

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Secretary Deb Haaland
United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Secretary Haaland:

Last week your Chief of Staff drafted an offensive email to my office which wildly mischaracterized the events of October 15th and October 16th, when your Department ordered violent military-style assaults on my People. The events of October 15th and 16th were yet another horrible stain on America's relationship with indigenous people, and it demonstrates the continued colonial mindset of domination and conquest that has always characterized the Interior Department's treatment of us.

I'm shocked that an Indigenous woman's immediate instinct would be to endorse unnecessary, unprovoked, and unjustified police actions against our own people – especially violent police actions in which Native women and children and elders were assaulted, hit, bruised, thrown to the ground, and threatened. It demonstrates a continued hostility to Indian sovereignty and a disregard for Indigenous people that is deeply troubling.

This incident was entirely the fault of your police officers' threat to seize and kill our horses, which is what escalated the situation and precipitated the police violence against us. The threats against our horses are what prompted our young people to immediately jump on top of our horse trailer and surround the trailer, to defend the sacred line of horses that were provided to us by our Lakota allies.

As you should know, the federal government's slaughter of our peoples' horses, buffalo, and warriors have been viscous and shameful tactics used to eradicate our people from these lands. That your police officers would continue to make these threats demonstrates that the institutional culture at your department has not changed.

Members of my delegation suspect that this police escalation was intentional, intended for the purpose of thwarting our meeting with Assistant Secretary Newland. We will be requesting all internal Departmental communications related to this incident, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and our Tribe's *Trail of Truth*. We deserve to know precisely who ordered this attack on us, and we strongly recommend against the destruction of emails, phone records, and other evidence.

Your National Park Police Officers and National Park Service officials were repeatedly informed of our legitimate presence, our peaceful intentions, and our willingness to coordinate our actions with law enforcement agencies. The well communicated lack of a permit in no way justifies the violence and abuse of police power that was waged against us.

In the communication from your Chief of Staff, Ms. Taylor states that, "Secretary Haaland asked me to convey that she will not tolerate physical or verbal assaults committed against law enforcement employees of the Department."

It's absolutely stunning to me that you – of all people – would immediately presume as fact the initial word of police agencies (who had just brutalized us) without reviewing the mountains of evidence and eyewitness statements. Instead, you accuse us of crimes that were never committed. No police officers were physically assaulted and that defamation against our people should not be allowed to stand. You, your Chief of Staff, and the National Park Service Police should apologize immediately.

The laws of the District of Columbia (*S22-1318. Driving or riding on footways in public grounds*) read: “If any person shall drive or lead any horse, mule, or other animal, or any cart, wagon, or other carriage whatever on any of the paved or graveled footways in and on any of the public grounds belonging to the United States within the District of Columbia, or shall ride thereon, except at the intersection of streets, alleys, and avenues, each and every ***such offender shall forfeit and pay for each offense a sum not less than \$1 nor more than \$5.***”

Why are minor infractions enforced so much more violently against Indigenous people?

It should also be well noted that the Capitol Hill police – which do not take direction from you – engaged with us in a vastly more supportive, collaborative, and accommodating posture than your National Parks Police. While the Capitol Hill police offered to provide a traffic escort to us on our horses as we intended to travel to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, your police agency was eager to intercept us and to wage violence against us.

In the same letter, your Chief of Staff continues to make the assertion that, “the Department is not able to administratively recognize the Muwekma Ohlone, and we reiterate that the only option for seeking federal recognition at this point is congressional action”. This is an ignorant understanding of the law and a misreading of Departmental regulations.

We have repeatedly laid out the legal pathway for administrative corrective action. I have enclosed that technical legal explanation to enhance your Office's understanding. I have no doubt that the motivations that you have vested in your relationships with Chairmen Mark Maccaro and Greg Sarris will far outweigh any interest you have in justice for my people.

Your unwillingness to come to the defense of our people in our time of need will forever stain your political career. You have fallen far short of the aspirations that Indian Country, and my people, once had for you.

Sincerely,



Charlene Nijmeh
Chairwoman