



# 2025 Tribal-State Legislative Impacts

*Date: July 2025*

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On April 30th, Montana's 69th legislative session officially ended. The session is a time when legislators gather for up to 90 days to create laws and a budget for Montana for the next two years, or the biennium. Tribal Nations, representatives, and citizens also join the lawmaking process. Tribal Nations have a government-to-government relationship with states. States have a mutual obligation to listen and communicate with Tribal governments to ensure resources are maximized for all their citizens. While the federal budget plays a significant role in Indian Country, the state budget also impacts Tribal communities. Through the state budget, the Montana Legislature identifies, prioritizes, and funds the public services we rely on.

One of Montana's unique features is that it has a group of legislators called the Montana American Indian Caucus. The Caucus is a group of primarily Indigenous legislators who work to support bills that are in the best interest of Indian Country. In this session, 12 American Indian legislators led the charge for Indian Country, producing many positive results.

This report summarizes some of the bills relevant to Tribal communities that the 2025 Legislature considered. Along with positive outcomes, this report also touches on missed opportunities for legislators to positively impact the lives of all Montanans. Both are important for identifying improvements Montana can make for future sessions.

Although the legislative session is over, lawmakers will continue to serve in the interim. For example, between sessions, the State-Tribal Relations Committee (STRC) acts as a liaison with Tribal governments, encourages intergovernmental cooperation, conducts interim studies, and reports its activities and findings to the Legislature. They travel to all reservations across Montana to hear from Tribal leadership, which helps them identify and shape goals for the upcoming session. The STRC may also propose legislation for the next legislature to consider.

### Economic Development and Infrastructure

<a href="#">HJ 1</a>	Resolution urging Congress to fully fund law enforcement in Indian Country	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">HB 952</a>	Authorizing the governor to enter into agreements with Tribal governments relating to marijuana	<b>Vetoed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 219</a>	Revise membership of the Board of Housing to require Tribal and veteran representation	<b>Failed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 303</a>	Require agency reporting on financial assistance to Tribes	<b>Passed</b>	

### Education

<a href="#">HB 499</a>	Extend the Grow Your Own grant program	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 107</a>	Provide for human trafficking prevention education in public schools	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 181</a>	Generally revise Indian education for all laws	<b>Passed</b>	

<a href="#">SB 182</a>	Generally revise MT Indian language preservation program	<b>Passed</b>	
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### Elections

<a href="#">SB 105</a>	Generally revise election laws related to electioneering at polling locations	<b>Passed</b>	
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### Health

<a href="#">SB 95</a>	Provide funding for suicide prevention	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 170</a>	Eliminate termination date of community health aide program	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 319</a>	Generally revise health care laws related to doulas	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SJ 29</a>	Interim study resolution on coordinating efforts between OPI and DPHHS in addressing the impacts on children of prenatal exposure to meth and fentanyl	<b>Passed</b>	

### Missing & Murdered Indigenous People

<a href="#">HB 83</a>	Establish a state special revenue account for Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">HB 545</a>	Revise missing and murder Indigenous person laws	<b>Passed</b>	

### Children & Families

<a href="#">SB 147</a>	Generally Revise Montana Indian Child Welfare Laws	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 180</a>	Generally revise laws related to the determination of the best interests of the child in custody and adoption proceedings	<b>Failed</b>	

### State Administration

<a href="#">HB 448</a>	Establish the Jim Loud Thunder Gopher memorial highway	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 224</a>	Create Indigenous Peoples' Day	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 311</a>	Enhance legislative understanding of State-Tribal relations	<b>Passed</b>	
<a href="#">SB 379</a>	Revise laws related to State-Tribal consultation	<b>Failed</b>	

## House Bill 2 Includes Millions in Funding for Indian Country

The state budget falls under House Bill 2 (HB 2) and determines the funding for most state agencies, like the Department of Public Health and Human Services or the Department of Corrections. The state budget represents the statewide investment in the public institutions and services that educate our children, keep our communities safe, and provide health care and other services to our neighbors who need them.<sup>1</sup>

At the start of the session, HB 2 is divided into six sections, each reviewed by its respective subcommittee of legislators. In the second week of February, subcommittees begin their first round of legislative decisions about the budget.

For more information on HB 2 subcommittees, please see our report on [Early Action on Budget Provides Some Investments, but Gaps Remain](#)

Montana raises money in the General Fund from individual and corporate income taxes, property taxes, and natural resource extraction and development taxes. The state is the sole funder for some programs and services in Indian Country, including the Tribal College Assistance Program (TCAP), Native Language Preservation, and an array of Indian Country Economic Development programs. The TCAP includes funding for High School Equivalency Tests (HiSET) and non-beneficiary students attending Tribal colleges.

The 69th biennium was a big year for education appropriations for Indian Country. The education portion of HB 2 (Section E) included approximately \$5.4 million of general fund dollars invested in Indian Country. This funding included \$1.5 million for the Indian Language Preservation Program, \$534,940 for the Indian Language Immersion Program, and \$30,000 to the Montana Advisory Council on Indian Education (MACIE).<sup>2,3</sup> This council meets eight times a year and advises the Superintendent of the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) on issues related to Indian Education for All.

The ongoing funding for the Tribal College Assistance Program (TCAP) that supports nonbeneficiary students had a previous appropriation capped at \$3,280 for each nonbeneficiary student, but was increased to \$4,1383 per student, leading to an additional \$550,480 to the TCAP funding. In total, a \$2.4 million investment from the General Fund supports the TCAP.<sup>4</sup> The 1-2 Free program also received an allocation so Tribal colleges could participate in the dual credit program, appropriating \$200,000 over the biennium. Section E also included an additional \$735,330 in funding to the University of Montana for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGRPA) Team.<sup>2</sup>

The Office of Indian Affairs is under Section A of HB 2 and received about \$469,000 from the General Fund and \$100,000 from the state special revenue account.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) task force, now called the Murdered and Missing Persons Advisory Council, was appropriated \$40,000 from a state special revenue account.<sup>6</sup> Last session, the Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) Program, managed by the Department of Commerce, was made part of the base budget and continues to be funded at \$1.8 million.<sup>7</sup>

During the 2025 legislative session, policymakers invested \$7.8 million in General Fund dollars in programs that directly impact and support Indian Country.<sup>8</sup> This figure doesn't include funding for statutory appropriations for bills like the Grow-Your-Own program and the Jim Loud Thunder Highway naming. According to its members, this legislative session may have marked the greatest success to date for Montana's American Indian Caucus.

## Economic Development and Infrastructure

**Title:** Resolution urging Congress to fully fund law enforcement in Indian Country

**Bill Number:** [HJ 1](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Tyson Running Wolf

**Outcome:** Passed

This resolution urges the United States Congress to fully fund public safety and law enforcement agencies, programs, services, and activities within Montana's reservations. The resolution invites Tribal Nations in Montana to adopt their own resolutions and send them to Congress.

**Title:** Authorizing governor to enter into agreements with Tribal governments relating to marijuana

**Bill Number:** [HB 952](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Frank Smith

**Outcome:** Vetoed

**Appropriations:** \$1,000

This act promotes and clarifies Tribal Nations' rights to enter into agreements with the governor on laws related to the regulation of marijuana. These marijuana agreements can address many marijuana-related issues that involve both the state and Tribal governments, such as taxation, commercial production, and regulatory matters. This bill appropriates \$1,000 from the general fund for one fiscal year to the Office of Indian Affairs to fund the capacity needed for creating compacts.

**Title:** Revise membership of the Board of Housing to require Tribal and veteran representation

**Bill Number:** [SB 219](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Susan Webber

**Outcome:** Failed

SB 219 would have changed membership requirements to have at least one member of the Board of Housing enrolled as a Tribal member and one member be a veteran. The Board of Housing was created to partner with organizations to provide affordable homes in Montana, issue tax-exempt bonds, allocate federal Low-Income Housing Credits, and administer programs for first-time and other eligible homebuyers. SB 219 would have supported continued representation of groups who often face increased barriers to accessing affordable housing.

**Title:** Require agency reporting on financial assistance to Tribes

**Bill Number:** [SB 303](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

This bill requires agencies that work closely with Tribal Nations and manage financial assistance programs to submit reports to the Office of Budget and Program Planning and Tribal Nations.

## Education

**Title:** Extend the Grow Your Own Grant Program

**Bill Number:** [HB 499](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Thedis Crowe

**Outcome:** Passed

**Appropriations:** \$500,000

The Grow Your Own Grant (GYO) is a program created to develop a teacher pipeline to serve rural and reservation school districts. The grant supports Montana colleges in creating dual enrollment courses that prepare future educators. It allows prospective teachers to take dual credit courses in education while in high school and engage in work-based learning opportunities such as student teaching. This program was created and funded in the 2021 Montana Legislature. HB 499 appropriates \$500,000 from the General Fund to GYO and extends the sunset date to June 2029.

**Title:** Provide for human trafficking prevention education in public schools

**Bill Number:** [SB 107](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Susan Webber

**Outcome:** Passed

SB 107 requires the OPI to create curricula on the prevention and avoidance of human trafficking for students, parents, and teachers. In Montana, the number of human trafficking cases tracked by the Montana Department of Justice increased 1,900 percent from 2015 to 2023.<sup>9</sup> Some of the most vulnerable demographics to human trafficking include children, runaway children, or those without stable housing.

This act was designed to be a more proactive approach to reducing the number of people affected by the MMIP epidemic.

**Title:** Generally revise Indian education for all laws

**Bill Number:** [SB 181](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

SB 181 revises policies related to Indian education for all to improve the state's commitment to preserving American Indian cultural integrity under Article X. It changes certain terms that outline collaboration to "consultation." It encourages public schools to utilize licensed Indian language and cultural specialists to help with their curriculum planning. It also specifies a funding reduction if school districts do not report how Indian education for all funding was spent.

**Title:** Generally revise the Montana Indian Language Preservation (MILP) program

**Bill Number:** [SB 182](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

SB 182 gives more flexibility for Tribal Nations to enter partnerships with educational entities that are not a part of the Montana public school system. Active efforts to preserve Tribal language and teach students have been made at the grassroots level, including educational entities like Tribal Colleges, early childhood learning institutions, and language immersion schools.

## Elections

**Title:** Generally revise election laws related to electioneering at polling locations

**Bill Number:** [SB 105](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

This bill changes the time frame in which electioneering is prohibited at ballot collection sites from election day to anytime ballots can be obtained or submitted at a location. Electioneering is when an individual attempts to persuade or influence the results of an election in favor of a particular party. This can include asking voters for their preferences, conducting polls, or gathering voter data.

## Health

**Title:** Provide funding for suicide prevention

**Bill Number:** [SB 95](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Mike Yakawich

**Outcome:** Passed

**Appropriations:** \$300,000

This bill allocates \$300,000 during the biennium to the Department of Public Health and Human Services to work alongside the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to prevent suicide among service members and veterans. This includes providing screenings, educating providers, and training peers to be able to identify the signs and offer prevention tools.

**Title:** Eliminate termination date of Community Health Aide Program (CHAP)

**Bill Number:** [SB 170](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

This bill ends the sunset date for CHAP. CHAP allows community health aides to provide care under the Indian Health Service Community Health Aide Program in Montana. To learn more about CHAP, visit [Community Health Aide Program: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

**Title:** Generally revise health care laws related to doulas

**Bill Number:** [SB 319](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Cora Neumann

**Outcome:** Passed

SB 319 is a bill generally revising healthcare laws related to doulas. The bill outlines laws pertaining to licensure and regulations of doulas. Doulas are required to gain licensure through the Department of Labor and Industry beginning in 2027. Additionally, this bill outlines that licensed doulas can bill Medicaid for their services, making their services more accessible. This can be a life-saving measure, especially in communities with limited prenatal and postnatal care.

**Title:** Interim study resolution on coordinating efforts between OPI and DPHHS in addressing the impacts on children of prenatal exposure to meth and fentanyl

**Bill Number:** [SJ 29](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

This resolution requests an interim study on addressing the impacts on children of prenatal exposure to meth and fentanyl. Montana has seen an increase in fentanyl seizures and continues to see an increase in drug overdose deaths. The interim study requires that the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) and the Department of Public Health Human Services (DPHHS) work together to produce a report on how to address the impacts of meth and fentanyl on children.

## Missing & Murdered Indigenous People

**Title:** Establish state special revenue account for Montana Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force

**Bill Number:** [HB 83](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Tyson Running Wolf

**Outcome:** Passed

**Appropriations:** \$1

HB 83 opens a state special revenue account administered by the Department of Justice for the MMIP Task Force. This account allows the task force to access funds like gifts, grants, and donations to better support their goal of reducing Indigenous missing persons in Montana.

**Title:** Revise missing and murder Indigenous person laws

**Bill Number:** [HB 545](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Tyson Running Wolf

**Outcome:** Passed

[HB 545](#) offers language revisions courtesy of a collaborative effort between the State-Tribal Relations Legislative Interim Committee (STRC) and the Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force. The revisions changed the name of the program from the "Missing Indigenous Persons Task Force" to the "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Advisory Council." This shift in name better outlines the role of the Advisory Council when cases of missing and murdered Indigenous people occur in Montana. It also extends the council's ability to support cases of homicide with the addition of a homicide investigator.

## Children & Families

**Title:** Generally revise Montana Indian Child Welfare Act (MICWA) laws

**Bill Number:** [SB 147](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy

**Outcome:** Passed

SB 147 removed the sunset date on MICWA. This act was established during the 2023 session when the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was being threatened through the court case *Haaland vs. Brackeen*. Congress passed ICWA in 1978 to address the separation of Indigenous children from their families. Although ICWA was upheld and ruled constitutional, MICWA codifies federal law into state law, reinforcing that American Indians stay connected to their Tribal communities.

**Title:** Allow consideration of a child's American Indian cultural heritage in child custody and placement proceedings

**Bill Number:** [SB 180](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Susan Webber

**Outcome:** Failed

This bill would have revised the list of factors a judge should consider when determining the custody of a child. It would have added the consideration of American Indian heritage to the list of factors that help determine a child's custody placement.

## State Administration

**Title:** Establish the Jim Loud Thunder Gopher Memorial Highway

**Bill Number:** [HB 448](#)

**Sponsor:** Rep. Jane Weber

**Outcome:** Passed

**Appropriations:** \$3,316

HB 448 establishes a memorial highway in Cascade County in honor of Jim Loud Thunder Gopher. Jim Loud Thunder Gopher (Ojibwe) was born in 1885 and was a spiritual practitioner and teacher of traditional Ojibwe teachings. He was also a community organizer, advocate, and strong supporter of Indigenous voting rights and agriculture.

**Title:** Create Indigenous Peoples' Day

**Bill Number:** [SB 224](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Shane Morigeau

**Outcome:** Passed

After a long-fought battle, SB 224 established Indigenous Peoples' Day as a recognized holiday in Montana. It takes place on the second Monday in October alongside Columbus Day. After a decade of strong support from across Indian Country, it has passed.

**Title:** Enhance Legislative Understanding of State-Tribal Relations

**Bill Number:** [SB 311](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Shane Morigeau

**Outcome:** Passed

This bill provides optional training for legislators on Indian Law and policy and requires regular updates to the State Tribal Relations handbook. The governor's office will work alongside a trainer of Tribal Nation's choosing to create this learning opportunity.

**Title:** Revise laws related to State-Tribal consultation

**Bill Number:** [SB 379](#)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Susan Webber

**Outcome:** Failed



SB 379 was a bill to define Tribal consultation for state agencies and create written consultation policies. The definition of Tribal consultation would have been a helpful guide for agencies on issues that significantly impact Indian Country, such as Tribal health, education policy, economics, and so much more.

### Key Takeaways:

**Significant Financial Investment:** The 2025 session allocated approximately \$7.8 million in General Fund dollars for Indian Country issues (doesn't include statutory appropriations) with funding towards education receiving the largest share with \$5.4 million. This demonstrates a meaningful commitment to Indigenous priorities.

**Strong Legislative Champions:** Members of the American Indian Caucus consistently emerged as advocates, sponsoring multiple successful bills addressing Indigenous concerns.

**Focus on Permanence:** Several bills removed sunset dates from successful programs (CHAP, MICWA), indicating a shift toward sustainable, long-term support rather than temporary initiatives.

**Cultural Preservation Wins:** Important victories in language preservation, Indigenous Peoples Day establishment, and enhanced Indian education for all requirements show progress in cultural recognition and protection.

**MMIP Progress:** Structural improvements to address missing and murdered Indigenous persons, including dedicated funding mechanisms and expanded investigative capacity.

The session shows strong progress in cultural recognition and some service areas, but gaps remain in housing, infrastructure, and institutional frameworks that could significantly impact long-term outcomes for Montana's Indigenous communities. This interim offers a chance to develop guidance on Indian Country priorities while preparing stronger consultation efforts for the next session.

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<sup>1</sup> Moreno, Z., "[HB 2 Executive Action: Budget Subcommittees First Round of Decisions on House Bill 2](#)," Montana Budget & Policy Center, Feb. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Montana 69<sup>th</sup> Legislature, "General Appropriations Act," HB 2, enacted on June 19, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Fiscal Division, "[HB 2 Narratives 2027 Biennium Section E](#)," accessed May 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Montana 69<sup>th</sup> Legislature, "[Authorize transfers and other necessary measure to implement HB 2 Section E](#)," HB 864, enacted on May 13, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Legislative Fiscal Division, "[HB 2 Narratives 2027 Biennium Section A](#)" accessed May 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Legislative Fiscal Division, "[HB 2 Narratives 2027 Biennium Section D](#)" accessed May 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Legislative Fiscal Division, "[2025 Biennium Fiscal Report: Section A, Dept. of Commerce](#)," July 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Montana Budget & Policy Center calculations using Montana Legislative Fiscal Division publications, on file with author.

<sup>9</sup> Montana Department of Justice, "[Stop Human Trafficking in Montana](#)," accessed July 2025.