

BIG PINE PAIUTE TRIBE OF THE OWENS VALLEY

Position Paper on the Protection and Reform of Tribal Enrollment Processes

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley holds that Tribal enrollment is not merely an administrative function, but a fundamental affirmation of our people's identity, belonging, and self-determination. As such, we recognize that the security, transparency, and fairness of our enrollment system must be a top priority to safeguard the rights of both current and future generations.

Recent incidents have revealed vulnerabilities in how enrollment processes and records have been administered, accessed, and, in some cases, weaponized. These events—including documented efforts to dis-enroll citizens through manipulated processes or the mishandling of sensitive documents—have exposed the need for systemic reform to restore trust and prevent future harm.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Tribe has experienced repeated and coordinated attempts by individuals, some previously in positions of authority, to exploit or manipulate the enrollment process to serve personal, political, or retaliatory goals. Specific concerns include:

- **Improper Access to Enrollment Files:** Unauthorized individuals have accessed and shared confidential enrollment records.
- **Destruction or Tampering with Enrollment Records:** Instances of lost, altered, or misrepresented enrollment documentation.
- **Weaponization of Disenrollment:** Use of committee influence or ambiguous procedures to challenge or revoke Tribal citizenship without due process.
- **Generational Harm:** Denial or delay of enrollment of individuals, and potentially disenfranchising their descendants, severing their legal and cultural ties to the Tribe.

These abuses represent more than isolated misconduct—they undermine the constitutional integrity of our Tribal government and erode the foundations of our sovereignty.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Tribe has seen examples of enrollment being used to punitively. I experienced this very type of abuse as exemplified by the 2008 denial of a conditional relinquishment request, followed 13 years later by an attempt to use that same denied request as justification for dis-enrollment. In more recent years, during efforts to contest the legitimacy of Tribal leadership, individuals involved in fraudulent acts—including impersonation of officials and document theft—were also tied to the manipulation of enrollment files and processes. This demonstrates the potential for enrollment authority to be misused in coordination with broader schemes to control Tribal government and resources.

IV. POLICY PRINCIPLES

To address these threats and reform the system, we affirm the following foundational principles:

1. Enrollment is a Right, Not a Weapon

The enrollment process must be used to affirm citizenship, not to punish or exclude based on political conflict or personal bias.

2. Due Process is Fundamental

Every citizen must have access to fair hearings, appeal rights, and the ability to challenge decisions regarding their enrollment status.

3. Security and Redundancy Are Non-Negotiable

Both physical and digital enrollment records must be protected from unauthorized access, tampering, and destruction.

4. Transparency and Oversight

All actions involving enrollment records must be logged, reviewed, and subject to independent oversight.

5. Education and Ethical Accountability

Those with access to enrollment files—especially Enrollment Committee members—must undergo regular training in ethics, Tribal law, and citizen rights.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Tribe proposes the following measures for immediate and long-term implementation:

1. Strict Archival Protocols

- Digitize all enrollment records and back them up in two secure locations.
- Store physical records in fireproof, locked facilities with access logs.
- Adopt a records retention and destruction policy consistent with Tribal law.

2. Controlled Document Access

- Implement role-based access controls and encrypted storage.
- Maintain real-time audit logs of file access, editing, and movement.
- Require dual-authentication for access to sensitive files.

3. Mandatory Ethics & Legal Training

- All Enrollment Committee members must complete annual training in:
- Confidentiality and fiduciary duties
- Tribal and federal enrollment laws
- Due process and rights of citizens
- No member may serve on the committee or access records without certification.

4. Independent Review Board

- Create a non-partisan review panel to handle disenrollment cases and appeals.
- Require written findings and formal hearings before any disenrollment action.

5. Community Communication

- Publish regular updates on enrollment statistics, appeals, and reforms (while protecting individual confidentiality).
- Create opportunities for community members to understand and provide feedback on the enrollment system.

VI. CONCLUSION

The time to act is now. The Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley must protect our citizens not only from external threats, but from internal erosion of our values and institutions. Reforming and securing our enrollment system is a foundational step toward healing historic harms, preventing future abuse, and protecting our sovereignty for generations to come.

We owe this not only to those who have been wronged in the past, but to the children and grandchildren who will one day look to their Tribal enrollment as a source of strength, belonging, and rightful place among the people.