

New Jersey judge dismisses tribe's lawsuit over recognition

Associated Press State & Local

March 9, 2016 Wednesday 11:06 PM GMT

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Section: STATE AND REGIONAL

Length: 265 words

Dateline: TRENTON, N.J.

Body

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) - A New Jersey judge has dismissed a lawsuit filed by a Native American tribe that claimed the state gave it official recognition in the 1980s but later rescinded the designation.

Superior Court Judge William Anklowitz upheld a motion from the attorney general's office Wednesday to dismiss the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape Tribal Nation's suit, which was filed last fall against Acting Attorney General John Hoffman.

The nation said that Hoffman, "wrongfully repudiated the state's official recognition of the nation as an American Indian tribe."

The suit claimed the nation was provided official status as an American Indian tribe through a 1982 state resolution. The tribe alleged that when it tried to reaffirm the designation it found the attorney general's office had decided to not recognize the nation in 2012.

Anklowitz ruled that the tribe was never established as an official entity because the resolution was never submitted to the governor. He stated that although there were legal measures taken in the years following 1982, none actually granted the nation official recognition.

Greg Werkheiser, the nation's attorney, said they plan to appeal the ruling. A second lawsuit is currently pending in federal court.

At face value, the recognition itself is just a customary honor to the 3,000 members of the Bridgeton-based nation. But without it, the nation cannot say artwork is American Indian made without being fined and they are also ineligible for scholarships and grant funding.

Assistant Attorney General Stuart Feinblatt declined to comment on outcome of the case.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: Spot Development

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Publication-Type: Newswire

Subject: NATIVE AMERICANS (97%); LITIGATION (93%); JUDGES (92%); SUITS & CLAIMS (92%); DECISIONS & RULINGS (91%); INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (91%); ATTORNEYS GENERAL (90%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (90%); PATENT COURTS (90%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (79%); APPEALS (78%); GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION (78%); LAW & LEGAL SYSTEM (78%); LAWYERS (78%); NEGATIVE PERSONAL NEWS (78%); REGIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (78%); GRANTS & GIFTS (67%); NJ--Tribe-Lawsuit (%); General news (%); Legal proceedings (%); Native Americans (%); Law and order (%)

Organization: New Jersey state government

Industry: LAWYERS (78%)

Geographic: TRENTON, NJ, USA (90%); NEW JERSEY, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (95%); NORTH AMERICA (79%); New Jersey; United States; North America

Load-Date: March 10, 2016

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