

Dear Chair Mariani,

I am honored to provide testimony in support of legislation (SF 1087 and HF 1042) that would establish a waiver process to the State Building Code and State Fire Code for Indigenous individuals and organizations to revive traditional building practices.

My hometown is Mountain Lake (in the southwestern part of the state). I grew up here and now have returned to care for my aging mother so she may remain relatively independent as long as possible.

As you know, following the US - Dakota war of 1862 nearly all Dakota people in Minnesota were killed or forced beyond the boundaries of the state. Immigrants from Europe then flooded into Minnesota. Many of these settlers in the Mountain Lake area were German Mennonites, including my paternal great-grandparents. Mennonites emphasize the ethic of discipleship, which means following the way of Jesus in everyday life. This is a part of my faith commitment.

In 2012, my family sold my grandparents' farm in southwestern Minnesota. I had to decide what to do with my share of the inheritance. I talked with the Indigenous Visioning Circle of the Mennonite Central Committee. Harley Eagle put me in touch with Waziyatawin, the founder of *Makoce Ikikcupi* (Land Recovery in Dakota).

I read her book, *What does Justice Look Like? The Struggle for Liberation in Dakota Homeland*. Reading the book and then talking with Waziyatawin in person were life-changing experiences. I knew what I had to do. Since the farm was Dakota homeland, I donated half the sale amount from my portion to Native organizations working for land justice—most to *Makoce Ikikcupi* (Dakota Land Recovery). Why half? I recalled the biblical story of Zacchaeus, the rich tax collector for the occupying government (the Roman Empire) who knew that in order to follow Jesus he had to make a big change. He returned half his wealth to the poor, and four times as much to anyone he personally defrauded. The lesson was clear - If you benefit from an oppressive system, you must make repair to those harmed by that system.

My ancestors came to Minnesota for two reasons - the offer of "free land" through the Homestead Act, and the freedom to practice their culture and religion. I am seeking to honor my ancestors and their/my culture and religion. This means doing right by the Dakota people who were forcefully removed to make the land available to settlers.

I strongly believe that Dakota people should have the right to build according to their cultural, ethical and religious traditions. Just as I have the right to honor the culture, ethics and religion of my German Mennonite ancestors by living out the ethic of discipleship as best I can.

Sincerely submitted,

John Stoesz
801 3rd Avenue, Apartment 219
Mountain Lake, MN 56159