

Seneca Nation considers new law to keep outside drug dealers off territory



[Dan Herbeck](#)

Seneca Nation lawmakers want to make it easier to ban non-Senecas who enter their territory to sell drugs or create other mayhem that endangers the public safety.

The Native American nation's government has asked Senecas to give their comments about a proposed "Exclusion Law" that would be used to banish outsiders who pose a threat to Seneca families.

Seneca President Rickey Armstrong Sr. declined to discuss the proposed law with The Buffalo News on Friday, but the tribe's official newsletter carried a description of the measure in its July issue.

"The proposed Exclusion Law is an effort by the Seneca Nation to protect our communities from non-Senecas that pose a threat to the safety and well-being of Senecas living on territory," the newsletter said.

The proposed law "provides a mechanism for identifying non-Senecas that pose a danger to our people and sets forth a formal process to prohibit those individuals from entering, residing, or remaining within Seneca Nation territories," it said.

The newsletter added that the proposed law would provide "penalties for violations of the law, including penalties for Senecas that aid or assist excluded persons to return or remain on territory."

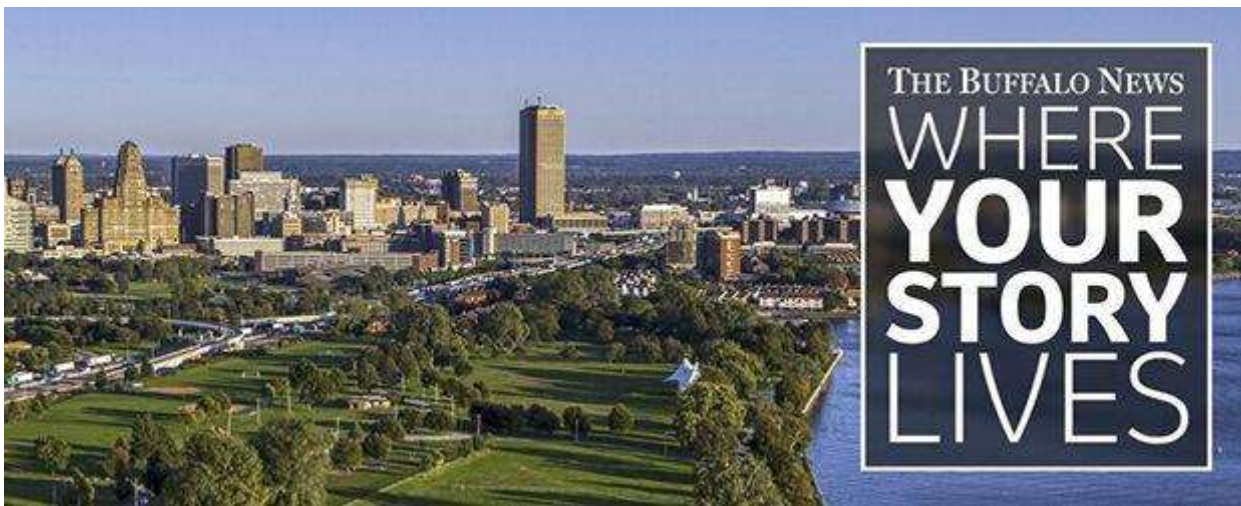
The Seneca Nation invited its approximately 8,000 members to voice their comments on the proposal to the government.

Armstrong said Friday it would be premature to comment on the proposal because it has not been approved by Tribal Council members.

Lucille White, a former Seneca Nation official who co-founded an organization called Seneca Mothers Against Drugs, said the new law – if passed – could help fight the drug problem.

“If this law was used in the right way in the fight against drug dealers, that would be really good for our nation,” White said. “Seneca mothers and elders founded SMAP because we have seen the damage caused by drugs. Many of the women in our group have known people who were killed by drugs. It’s a very serious problem.”

Several other Senecas declined to discuss the proposal with a News reporter on Friday.



“It’s a touchy issue with many people, there’s been a lot of talk about it,” one Seneca business executive said.

“I think most (Senecas) support the idea of keeping out the drug dealers who have caused so much harm to our children and grandchildren in this community. But some people are worried that it could be used to punish people who speak out against the wrong politicians.”

“Many, many” Seneca families have been hurt by drug trafficking in the Seneca territories, much of which the Senecas blame on non-Senecas who bring in illegal drugs from other communities, said the business executive, a close follower of Seneca politics.

“I know a young woman who died last year from taking heroin that was brought here by an outside drug dealer,” said the business executive, who is not authorized to speak for the Nation and spoke on the condition that he or she would not be named.

A law enforcement official who works frequently with Seneca Nation marshals said the Indian tribe wants to improve its procedures for banishing and excluding drug dealers from its territories.

Several years ago, Senecas who were upset with the harm caused by a non-Seneca drug dealer set fire to the drug dealer’s home on Seneca land, the law enforcement official said.

In 2018, White and other Seneca women who were outraged over drug overdoses started the SMAD organization, which lobbies for stronger efforts to stop drug trafficking and other crimes.

The drug dealer's house was burned by people who were angry about his harmful activities, one SMAD member told The News. "The dealer was not in his house when it burned. We didn't do it, but some people blamed us for it."

While declining to address the issue with The News on Friday, Seneca Nation officials have spoken out about drug crimes in the past.

In 2016, the Seneca Nation announced that it had "banished" six people from its territories for drug dealing. In 2020, Seneca government issued posters describing two men who had been "excluded" from Seneca land for dealing drugs.

Armstrong, as president, issued a statement in December 2020 about the "drug epidemic" affecting America. Armstrong said the Senecas and other Indian tribes were disproportionately affected by problems with drug addiction.

The Seneca Nation "will not stand for non-native drug dealers operating on our territory," Armstrong said at the time.