Senate Resolution No. 904

BY: Senator ADDABBO

RECOGNIZING the atrocities of the Thomas Indian School and the impact it had on Indigenous communities

WHEREAS, Indigenous Nations have faced centuries of broken promises, dispossession, and systemic efforts to eradicate Native cultures, languages, and identities; and

WHEREAS, Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, forced removal, coerced treaty-making, and the operation of Indian Boarding Schools led to the widespread displacement and cultural genocide of Indigenous peoples, including the Onondowa'ga:' (Seneca people) and the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations); and

WHEREAS, Indian Boarding Schools, including the Thomas Indian School-formerly known as the Thomas Asylum for Orphaned and Destitute Children-located on the Cattaraugus territory, aimed to assimilate Native children by forcibly removing them from their families, communities, and traditional ways of life; and

WHEREAS, The Thomas Indian School, like many such institutions, was not a haven for orphaned children but a site of sanctioned ethnic cleansing where children were stripped of their names, languages, and cultural practices and subjected to physical, emotional, and psychological abuse; and

WHEREAS, This ideology, and the atrocities it enabled, has left a legacy of intergenerational trauma that continues to affect Indigenous families today, manifesting in cycles of substance abuse, chronic illness, violence, cultural dissociation, depression, survivor's guilt, and unremitting grief-symptoms that extend beyond emotional scars and influence genetic expression and overall health across generations; and

WHEREAS, Closure, as commonly understood, is inadequate to describe the complex path forward for Indigenous Peoples; for them, true resolution cannot mean forgetting or merely moving on but must include knowledge, healing practices, spiritual ceremonies, and repatriation of those who were lost, as part of a collective movement to reclaim dignity and ancestral legacy; and

WHEREAS, In 2021, the Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Nation in Canada announced the discovery of 215 unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, reigniting the pain and memories for survivors of Indian boarding schools throughout Turtle Island-including those connected to the Thomas Indian School-and serving as a powerful call to action; and

WHEREAS, This moment galvanized a movement to return Indian Boarding School children home in a traditional fashion, with the dignity, ceremony, and love that had been denied them, and the message of that

movement-E:shenohdendi' (Seneca: They are going home)-has profound spiritual significance for the Seneca Nation and all affected communities; and

WHEREAS, Meaningful and ongoing actions are possible to support community-led healing, cultural revitalization, truth-telling, and justice; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to solemnly recognize the historical atrocities committed at the Thomas Indian School and to acknowledge the enduring trauma inflicted upon the Onondowa'ga:', Haudenosaunee, and all Indigenous peoples of this State, reaffirming its commitment to truth, reconciliation, and healing by promoting education, awareness, and accountability for this painful legacy; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to the leadership of the Seneca Nation of Indians, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and appropriate state and federal officials to affirm New York State's recognition of this grave historical injustice and its dedication to justice, remembrance, and healing.