

WRITTEN TESTIMONY of the RAMAH NAVAJO SCHOOL BOARD, INC.

Submitted to the
**United States House and Senate Appropriations
Subcommittees on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Regarding the FY 2018 Indian Affairs Budget**
Date Submitted: May 15, 2017

Honorable Chairman and Committee members. I am Marlene Martinez, the President of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. (RNSB). Ahé hee'. Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral testimony for the consideration of the Congress. We have a relationship that extends back to 1970 (over 47 years) when the Founders of Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. ("RNSB") came before you to request your help to establish the first tribally controlled and operated school in the Nation. We are proud to inform you this day that the RNSB still operates and manages the Pine Hill Schools under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

Our purpose here today is to report to you the dire condition of our school buildings that is nearing the end of its useful life. After nearly half a century, the BIA School facilities at the Pine Hill Schools (1) are aging and showing significant wear and tear; (2) have deteriorated beyond repair; (3) have inoperable and failed heating systems; (4) have dilapidated and unsafe water systems; and (5) are unusable because of dangerous mold conditions due to leaking roofs.

In just the past five years, it has gotten to the point where the students have been sent home early during schools hours due to cold classrooms or a water line break on campus that causes no water or low water pressure situations. The lack of water or low water pressure is due to a dilapidated water system; it is corroded and near a total collapse. All the while the students are also exposed to a dangerous environment due to mold, cold classrooms, and leaking roofs in certain classrooms, or playing on a wet basketball court in the gymnasium, and walking on crumbling sidewalks. *See Tab-1 "Office of Inspector General Report of Findings"*. The conditions at the Pine Hill Schools have been detrimental to student learning, scholastic achievement, and environmental safety. Valuable time for student instruction has been interrupted and lost, and those conditions are directly attributable to the underachievement for many of the students.

An investigative report conducted in 2014 by an Albuquerque news channel, through Larry Barker, labeled the Pine Hill Schools as *See Tab-2 "The most dangerous school in America?"* This is absolutely unacceptable and contrary to congressional intent. That labeling came as result of an investigative report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) that cited the Pine Hill Schools with numerous facility violations, which if not corrected could have resulted in penalties against the RNSB or even the shutdown of the school. *See Tab-1A "Corrective Action to OIG Findings Report"*. Of the approximately 30 findings RNSB has corrected and resolved 24 of them. Those that remain unresolved are the Library, Kindergarten, and Gymnasium buildings; and they require major work.

RNSB established a priority projects list with a set timeline of one year to resolve the leaking roofs and mold in the *Library, Kindergarten, and Gymnasium* buildings. This includes the installation of a *new heating system* in the High School building and an upgrade of the dilapidated water system.

The estimated cost of conducting the improvements and repairs *See Tab-3 MAXIMO Priority Listing*:

Priority Projects **Estimated Cost**

- 1) Library Building Repair
Mold abatement and Leaking Roof \$823,478

- 2) Kindergarten Building Repair
Mold Remediation, Leaking Roof, Replacements of Windows
Bathrooms, Carpets, HVAC \$298,407

- 3) Gymnasium Building
Mold Remediation, Repair of Leaking Roof, Replacement
of Old Insulation, Floor, Showers, and Lockers \$1,230,901

- 4) Heating System in the High School Building \$450,000
In September 2016 BIA committed to designing and installing a heating system at the Pine Hill High School by mid-December 2016 so that the students could enjoy warm classrooms for once. But that did not happen, and that makes it six (6) years in a row the heating system has been inoperable. Instead, the project was still in the design stage as of April 2017; so very likely the construction may not be completed until late summer of 2017.

Total Buildings and Heating System **\$2,802,786**

- 5) Water System Upgrade (Wells, Pumps, Waterlines, Tanks, Water Treatment) *See Tab-4 "Existing water system layout-blue line"*
Pre-Engineering Report \$ 150,000
Design and Engineering 500,000
Construction - Upgrade of Water System 3,500,000

Total Water System Upgrade **\$4,150,000**
Total Medium Term Funding Requested **\$6,952,786**

- 6) New School 186,500 SF \$40,012,500
Tab-5 "Conceptual Site Plan-New Building Layout & Cost"

There is also the question of maintaining obsolete facilities that have surpassed its useful life. Therefore the reason and justification to build a new school is to re-invest in the long-term future of the children and youth of the Ramah Navajo Community.

Long Term Solution

The above first five (5) items are considered medium-term solutions. Whereas, the long-term solution (Item No. 6) that RNSB seeks is Congressional appropriation for a whole new replacement school. A modern up to date new educational facility that meets the standards that permits a high-quality educational and living environment where RNSB students can thrive and prepare themselves for a promising future. Considering all costs for planning, designing and engineering the cost for a whole new replacement school is estimated at \$40,012,500.

It is obvious and evident that RNSB cannot rely on BIA to perform any required repair and maintenance, nor live up to its Trust responsibility. Therefore, RNSB requests the commitment of the Congress once again through the BIA and BIE: (1) to correct the above mentioned deficiencies; and (2) initiate new congressional appropriations for the planning, design, and construction of new educational facilities as soon as possible.

Summary

RNSB request the US Congress to direct the BIA and BIE to complete repairs and mold remediation to the Library, Kindergarten, and Gymnasium buildings, the installation of a heating system for the High School, and the upgrade of the water delivery system at the Pine Hill Schools. Furthermore, RNSB request the Congress to appropriate sufficient funds for planning, design and construction of a new school at Ramah Navajo. Thank you for your time and RNSB looks forward to the Congress favorable consideration.

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We look forward to working with the Subcommittee on furthering the important work of our school and enriching our students. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please contact me at marlene@rnsb.k12.nm.us if you have any questions.