

**Testimony of Councilman Louie Ungaro
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies
February 11, 2019**

Summary of Budget Requests:

- I. Bureau of Indian Education – Funding for school construction
- II. Bureau of Indian Affairs Division of Facilities Management and Construction
- III. Bureau of Indian Education – Funding for culturally rooted educational programming

Introduction & Background

Good afternoon Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. My name is Louie Ungaro and I have the privilege of serving on the Muckleshoot Tribal Council and chairing the Tribe's Education Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Muckleshoot Tribe ("Tribe") is committed to the success of our children through culturally appropriate education that will prepare them for the future. The Tribe operates the Muckleshoot Tribal School, which is a comprehensive Tribally Controlled School that works in conjunction with the Bureau of Indian Education ("BIE") and the State of Washington as a Tribal Compact School to serve the needs of our community. The school provides K-12 instruction for Native American students focusing on Common Core Standards while infusing Muckleshoot culture, practices, and history in our future generations. This intersection of modern learning and culture will ensure that our children can compete in the modern economy while not losing their identities.

The Muckleshoot Tribal School ("MTS") was constructed in 2009 as a world-class and state of the art campus. Its enrollment has grown each year to its current student population of 565. The Tribe, the Education Commission, and school leadership have been aggressively working to increase our on-time graduation rate. The on-time graduation rate is based on a "cohort" of students that begin 9th grade together. I am proud to share that we have raised our on-time cohort graduation rate dramatically from 42.1% in 2017 to 73.8% in 2019. There is always more work to be done but we are incredibly motivated by the progress of our students and the dedication of their teachers.

It is important to preface my testimony by explaining how the MTS's leadership has worked to meet the needs of our students through the adoption of new and exciting programs. These programs include:

- **Social Emotional Learning Course** – According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, an organization that works toward integrated social-emotional learning, "social and emotional learning is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to

understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

- **AVID Course required for all 6th and 7th grade students** – AVID, which stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a college readiness program designed to help students develop the skills they need to be successful in college. The program places special emphasis on growing writing, critical thinking, teamwork, organization and reading skills.
- **Special Services moving to an inclusive education model for students with an IEP** – The push-in (Inclusive) model brings the instruction and any necessary materials to the student. In contrast the Pull-out services typically happen in a setting outside the general education classroom. While the general education teacher is an important resource, they are rarely involved in pull-out services.
- **Kings for Success Program** – This after school program provides additional support in Math, Science, English/ELA, and Social/Emotional Learning. It will also provide enrichment activities and clubs such as Chess and STEM.
- **Student Leadership Development Programs** – MTS has developed and implemented a new high school leadership class to compliment the two middle school leadership classes. The purpose of these courses is to help students develop leadership skills necessary for success in their future academic endeavors and careers through effective communications, problem-solving techniques, and managing resources and meetings. The students will develop an understanding of the need for community service as part of their overall civic and professional responsibilities.
- **Language & Cultural Instruction** – All elementary students receive language and culture instruction. Middle school and high school students can continue to study the Muckleshoot language as an option. In addition, MTS has embedded Muckleshoot culture and language throughout our school and in our curriculum by: having bilingual signage and visual communications; drums circle; diet and nutrition that includes Indigenous foods, traditional cooking methods and horticulture; culture nights and potlach; and woodshops to teach traditional carving practices.
- **Environmental Education** – All children, Muckleshoot Children Development Center (MCDC) through high school, are immersed in an environmental education program on the 105,000 acre Tomanamus Forest. The program includes a partnership with Pacific Education Institute and Hancock Forest Management. The Pacific Education Institute provides a high-quality professional development and consultation services for educators in equitable, locally relevant, career connected, outdoor STEM education to develop students into scientifically literate citizens, equipped to make balanced decisions for sustainable communities. Hancock Forest Management, the Tomanamus land and forest manager, provides the field experience in a variety of ways including field STEM education, summer environmental education, summer stewardship youth corps, and a variety of other STEM based education programs.

These programs ensure that MTS students are provided with the tools, skills, and education that they will need to lead our people and our future generations. However, I did want to highlight some areas of federal funding and partnership that will help to bolster the Tribe's efforts.

I. Bureau of Indian Education – Funding for school construction

As discussed above, the MTS was constructed in 2009 as a state-of-the-art facility for our students. The construction of the MTS was the result of years of advocacy by the Muckleshoot Tribe and Tribal Council. We were overjoyed when we finally secured the federal funding necessary to accomplish this for our children.

However, disagreements quickly emerged between the Tribe and the BIE over how large the school should be and what capacity it should hold. The BIE wanted to use the current student size, which we knew would not be sufficient. That analysis failed to consider the large growth that the Tribe was experiencing in the population of under-kindergarten age children and the projected growth rates of the Tribe as a whole. Unfortunately, the BIE did not listen and shortly after the construction of MTS we hit the capacity and soon surpassed it.

This situation will only become more difficult as time goes on because the Tribe's ten-year student population projection is 827. That is a 32% increase in ten years over the Tribe's current student population of 565. The MTS was built for a combined student and staff population of only a 468 maximum. So, the current student population – not even taking staff into account – is already overcapacity by 102 students.

We urge the Subcommittee to prioritize school construction funding so that Indian Country's children can obtain a quality education in a safe environment. Further, the Tribe requests that the Subcommittee ask the BIE to reconsider how it determines the size of new school constructions.

II. Bureau of Indian Affairs – Division of Facilities Management and Construction

The overcrowding situation at MTS peaked in the past few years. The MTS and the Tribe tried creative solutions to ensure that Muckleshoot students were not impacted but at the end of the day there are only so many rooms and so many square feet in a given building. The MTS was forced to hold some classes in the hallways and to repurpose other spaces to meet the needs of our students.

The Tribe and BIA began working together in 2015 to try to secure modular classrooms to accommodate the student population growth. The Tribe received a visit from the BIA's Division of Facilities Management and Construction ("DFMC") in March of 2017 and during that visit DFMC staff recommended that six modular units housing twelve classrooms. The BIA approved funding for the project in May 2017. DFMC stated that they anticipated an August 2017 delivery for the modular classrooms in order to accommodate the upcoming new school year.

The Muckleshoot Tribal Council moved quickly to appropriate \$1 million to provide furniture for the classrooms and cover non-BIA funded construction costs. Unfortunately, the modular

classrooms were not delivered in August 2017 and the project lingered with intermittent communications from the BIA and DFMC. The DFMC complained that issues with contractors were slowing down the progress so the Tribe requested to assume the role of general contractor in March 2019. Even after the Tribe assumed the general contractor role for the project it took the direct interaction of Congress to finalize our work with the DFMC and to get the funds released.

It was during an advocacy trip to Washington, D.C. last spring that Tribal Council raised this issue directly with you Chairwoman McCollum and Congresswoman Schrier that we received assistance. You both, and your amazing staff, began outreach to the BIA and DFMC to inquire about the situation. Your persistence and willingness to help our Tribe ensured that the modular classrooms were delivered and functional for this school year.

The Muckleshoot Tribe is forever grateful for your assistance, but it should not take a tribe coming directly to Congress to get the answers and response necessary from the DFMC. The Tribe requests that the Subcommittee inquire about the organizational structure of the DFMC and how it is deploying the funding resources that Congress provides it.

III. Bureau of Indian Education – Funding for culturally rooted educational programming

The Tribe believes it is critical to provide an education that is culturally rooted for our students and to ensure that they have access to cultural resources throughout their education. That is why the MTS has placed such an emphasis on culture in our system. This approach has proven successful at MTS and our students have benefitted from higher educational outcomes and a better grounding in their identity as Muckleshoot.

The BIE has an Immersion Demonstration Grant program that provides funding that supports immersion efforts that increase language proficiency and protect against language loss. These sorts of demonstration projects should be expanded and made permanent so that more tribes are able to access their benefits.

Although, outside of this Subcommittee’s jurisdiction I highly encourage the full Committee to support several programs at the Department of Education that provide resources for the inclusion of culture in the educational process. Title VI of the Every Student Succeeds Act (“ESSA”) includes authorizations for Language Immersion and National Activities. These programs help deploy invaluable funding to Indian Country to protect our languages. Also, Title VI of ESSA also authorizes the Indian Education Formula Grants, which can be utilized to provide culturally related activities.

The Tribe requests that this Subcommittee continue to support increases to the BIE’s overall budget, to programs that support inclusion of culture and language into the curriculum, and finally programs that encourage our students’ interactions with the living world.

Conclusion

I appreciate the opportunity to bring the Muckleshoot Tribe’s voice to this table today.