



Oneida Nation
Oneida Business Committee
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WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF TEHASSI HILL, CHAIRMAN, ONEIDA NATION

March 9, 2023

Submitted electronically to IN.Approp@mail.house.gov

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY24 Annual Appropriations

Dear Chair Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree,

On behalf of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin (“the Nation”), I submit the following testimony for the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies hearing on the fiscal year 2024 annual appropriations bill. The subcommittee has requested written testimony from tribal leaders on the issues and needs of Indian Country related to the Department of Interior, the Indian Health Services, and other Agencies. The agencies and programs involved in the Nation’s requests are: the Indian Health Service, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Indian Health Service Funding

I would like to begin my formal remarks by offering this subcommittee and those who serve on the full committee the gratitude of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin for your efforts to provide advanced appropriations to cover the Indian Health Service for fiscal year 2024. As you know, providing health security to our members has been a priority for our Nation and all of Indian Country for many years. Your efforts will likely save lives and bring calm to many who depend on the IHS for their services. This was a great first step in ensuring the federal government meets trust and treaty obligations.

The next step is full and mandatory funding for the IHS. Access to healthcare is a core element of the federal treaty and trust responsibility. Last year, for the first time ever, the President's budget proposed mandatory funding for the IHS. Moving IHS funding from discretionary to mandatory will ensure that the health of our people will no longer be impacted by government shutdowns or delays in the appropriations process. I am here to ask that you work with your colleagues on other committees to help us reach this goal.

Long-Term Care

Groundbreaking language giving the IHS specific authorities for provision of long term care was authorized under the Affordable Care Act. These authorities represented a major step forward for our communities. Unfortunately, while authorized, these services have not been funded. We request Congress fund long-term care in their FY 2024 appropriations.

The Nation has operated a long-term care facility since 1978 and currently operates a 48-bed multi-purpose building that includes skilled nursing, a congregate elder meal site, and physical therapy services. Currently, we do not receive IHS funding to provide our long-term care services.

BIA Law Enforcement

Our Nation's law enforcement program is severely underfunded, even by Indian Country standards. We only receive about 4% of our operating budget for criminal investigations. That doesn't even cover the payroll of one of our 22 officers.

We use our own tribal funds to make up the difference. We have no choice....we need to keep our people safe.

Our funding allocation for public safety is so low because the BIA has chosen not to fund police for tribes in Public Law 280 States. The Bureau tells us that in P.L. 280 states like Wisconsin, the state—not our tribal government—has primary criminal jurisdiction. So we don't need the money, they say.

That is wrong. If we don't provide emergency services for the 27,000 people living across the 102 square miles of our Reservation, no one will. In 2021, our officers made 173 arrests, of which 133 were drug-related. We cannot ignore these crimes and just say someone else will handle it.

I appreciate that the Committee is already engaged on this issue. We supported the language included in the Fiscal Year 2023 omnibus. But I am here to tell you that you need to go further. Every tribe must receive some BIA law enforcement funding so that we can protect our people. If the BIA won't allocate the money to keep us safe, you need to force them to do it. To that end, I ask that you set a minimum allocation of \$500,000 for each tribe within the BIA public safety line item.

Realty Services Funding

The Nation asks appropriators to increase funding for equipment to assist and expedite our processes to acquire lands. The BIA's Division of Land Titles and Records is to maintain timely and certified Federal land title ownership records. However, many of the details associated with the work of this office are carried out by tribes on their respective reservations. Specifically, tribes are often responsible for carrying out duties associated with the management of the Trust Asset and Accounting Management System (TAAMS), the BIA's electronic trust land management system. While BIA employees are provided with new equipment on a regular basis, the tribes being asked to help carry out these programs are failing to receive similar upgrades, or in some instances, enough computer hardware to carry out their responsibilities.

Beyond the lack of support for technology, BIA has an abysmal track record of completing realty transactions in a timely manner. Fee to trust applications for even the clear-cut examples can take between five and ten years to complete. Realty transactions on Tribal residential, agriculture, and commercial leased properties can take six months to a year, if not longer. Individual trust probates take at least five years if not longer. It is clear that the BIA's trust and realty offices are under-resourced and understaffed, and the Nation asks that Congress provide funding to rectify these chronic issues.

EPA Funding

We would like the Committee to know the Oneida Nation takes the protection of our lands and waterways seriously. To this end, we have partnered with the Environmental Protection Agency for many years. For example, Section 106 of the Clean Water Act funds a major part of our Water Resources Program. However, our resources are stressed, particularly since funding has not increased in 24 years. We also take advantage of Section 319 of the Clean Water Act which partially funds our non-point source program. This program did recently see an increase after many years, from \$30,000 to \$36,000 annually - thank you.

With a Good Mind, a Good Heart and Strong Fire,

Tehassi Hill

Chairman

A good mind. A good heart. A strong fire.

