

OMAHA TRIBE OF NEBRASKA

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Written Testimony of
THE HONORABLE CHEYENNE ROBINSON
SECRETARY, OMAHA TRIBE OF NEBRASKA

Submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environmental, and Related
Agencies

**2026 Appropriations Testimony for Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, and
Indian Health Service**

February 26, 2025

On behalf of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, I am pleased to submit this written testimony on our funding priorities for fiscal year 2026 Department of Interior (DOI), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and Indian Health Service (IHS) budgets. The following Investments will strengthen the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, affirm sovereignty, raise self-reliance and support our continued nation building.

Omaha Nation Tribal Funding Priorities – Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

- 1) ***\$3.2 Billion for Tribal and National Funding Priorities – Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services (OJS)***
- 2) ***\$26 Million for Omaha Nation "Justice Center" -Corrections, Tribal Court, Dispatch***
- 3) ***\$500,000 planning grant Omaha Nation Justice Center***
- 4) ***\$40 million increase to Fully Fund and Expand the TIWAHE Initiative***

Omaha Nation Tribal Support for Indian Country Priorities – Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and Indian Health Service (IHS)

- 1) ***Advanced Appropriations for Tribal Programs and Services***
- 2) ***Contract Support Costs (CSC) Mandatory Funding and Section 105(I) Leases***
- 3) ***Exempt Agencies from Reductions in Force (RIF) – Ensure that capacity to staff and carry out Trust and Treaty Obligations are Protected***

Introduction. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska is appreciative of the opportunity to offer our views on the FY 26 Budget. While we have significant unmet needs in virtually all facets of tribal government services these priorities represent our most critical, and deferment is no longer an option for the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska.

The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska's reservation is 198,400 acres and is home to over 7,100 tribal citizens. We are a large land-based Tribe and our homeland is buttressed by Interstate 29 on the eastern border, and we are neighbors with the metropolis of Sioux City Iowa. The close proximity to both Interstate 29 and 90 creates unique challenges to effective mitigation of drug and human trafficking. Even within American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations we continue to rank near the bottom in terms of health, education, economic status and housing. These difficult statistics mirror the funding inequities faced by the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. We believe that the Appropriations Committee has an opportunity in both the Budget Reconciliation Process and FY 26 Appropriations process to shift the paradigm and funding structure to address chronic law and order issues in Indian Country.

Fulfilling Treaty and Trust Obligations. In a series of treaties with the United States culminating in 1865 the Omaha Nation ceded millions of acres of the richest farmland in America in exchange for treaty and trust obligations surrounding health, education, housing, continued self-government, law and order and the promise of a livable Tribal community. These solemn contractual agreements were not acts of government largesse but binding legal obligations based on our political classification as a distinct Tribal sovereign nation. To the extent of our health, education, employment, housing and facility maintenance and needs indicators these trust and treaty obligations are not being met. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska believes that fully funding "*treaty-based appropriations*" and the establishment of a comprehensive multi-purpose Omaha Nation Justice Center will address a multitude of critical needs.

\$3.2 Billion Dollars – Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office Justice Services / \$26 Million Dollars Omaha Nation Justice Center

Our Tribe has a strong interest in securing our borders, addressing both drug and human trafficking and enabling a safe environment for our tribal members particularly our youth and elders. We are seeking the establishment of a comprehensive *Omaha Nation Justice Center* encompassing Tribal Court, Juvenile and Adult Detention Facilities, Probation, Tribal Police, Dispatch and Indian Child Welfare. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska is requesting 26 million for the construction of the facility. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska is seeking this Federal investment so that we can properly and responsibly assume and administer Justice services to our members and other enrolled members of federally recognized tribes. The Omaha Nation Justice Center will address a range of critical services, break down silos, coalesce services to maximize their impact. The Omaha Tribe has significant spiritual, cultural and historical assets that will guide the delivery of services.

The Tribes current correctional facility is antiquated like so many throughout Indian country. The Jail is dilapidated, unsafe, ill-equipped to manage the needs of individuals with substance use disorders and mental health issues and in general the fentanyl crisis.

The Omaha Tribe is requesting that the Committee explore opportunities within the Budget Reconciliation process to address Law and Order issues in Indian country including correction facilities in congruence with President Trump's Law and Order priorities.

\$500,000 planning investment Omaha Tribes Justice Center

An Omaha Tribe Justice Center planning investment will allow us to create a feasibility study and start **Phase I planning for a new Justice Center** that would expand culturally relevant mental health services and substance abuse programs for juveniles and adults. This funding would allow us to envision a modern, secure, and rehabilitative detention facility that prioritizes substance abuse treatment, re-entry programs, and restorative justice. This investment will be a comprehensive, integrated care approach and engage all stakeholders in our community, including law enforcement, child welfare, Tribal courts, school districts, and direct service programs in family violence prevention and related services.

\$40 million increase to Fully Fund and Expand the TIWAHE Initiative

The TIWAHE model is a culturally responsive best practice for sovereign Tribes and requires additional funding to meet the needs of additional Tribes in expansion.

TIWAHE is a coordinated service delivery model that increases access to family and social services, creates alternatives to incarceration, improves links to appropriate prevention, intervention and treatment opportunities, improves case management services, and improves partnerships among the available service providers for Tribal children and families. TIWAHE allows Tribes to reimagine and build structures that reflect tribal views, approaches, values, and traditions responsive to the communities they serve and affirms sovereignty. A key development for TIWAHE is the effort to design a common framework that introduces an outcomes-based performance model to measure success and report the aspirations and progress of tribal communities. The TIWAHE Outcomes Framework acts as a unifying force and common language for tribes to reference success in their work with the Federal Government.

Recidivism is the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend, thus the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) asserts that by implementing a comprehensive strategy that involves better screening, alternative courts, increased treatment opportunities, probation programs, and critical interagency and intergovernmental partnerships between tribal, state and federal stakeholders, will succeed in substantially reducing recidivism in Indian Country.

Omaha Tribe of Nebraska Tribal Support for Indian Country Priorities -Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Indian Health Service Bureau of Indian Affairs/Indian Health Service (IHS)-

1. Ensure the BIA and IHS are exempt and protected from arbitrary terminations and work force reductions and hiring freezes: The modernization of these agencies and engagement in new roles and responsibilities such as TIWAHE, 105(I) Leases, Missing and Murdered Persons, and PL 102-477 requires additional staffing. The ongoing efforts to reduce staff create a significant barrier to effectively carrying out Trust and Treaty obligations.
2. Advance Appropriations: Tribal programs are crippled by government shutdowns, sequestration, continuing resolutions and budget cuts. The uncertainty surrounding the funding of trust and treaty obligations is greatly alleviated with advanced appropriations. This includes mandatory spending on Contract Support Costs. Providing

appropriations one year in advance for BIA, BIE, IHS is in line with legal and moral obligations that ensure funding for treaty and trust obligations.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)- The Federal Government is solely responsible for funding two school systems in the United States, they are Department of Defense Military Schools and Indian Schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education. President Trump signed EO 14191 which included provisions addressing Bureau of Indian Education and potential vouchers for school choice funded from BIE operations. This dangerous and unprecedented effort will if implemented effectively end treaty-based appropriations that support the operations of existing BIE schools. The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska along with the Santee Sioux Tribe founded Nebraska Indian Community College in 1973, we are charter members of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Haskell Indian Nations (heavily used by Omaha Tribal citizens) and Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) are being impacted by terminations and funding sequestration threatening their accreditation. Tribal Colleges need clear and unambiguous support from this committee.

Conclusion The Omaha Tribe of Nebraska appreciates the work of the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBIC), the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), regional Intertribal organizations to promote a fair budget for Indian country. We thank this Committee for holding this hearing and for your unwavering support to Indian country. The Omaha Tribe looks forward to working with this Committee during these challenging times.