



**Testimony of Oneida Nation Chairman, Tehassi tasi Hill  
Before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,  
and Related Agencies  
February 26, 2025**

Shekoli Swakewku (Greetings Everyone), Honorable Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree and the members of the Committee. I am honored to be here today on behalf of Oneida Nation

Oneida Nation is a Title IV and Title V Self-Governance Tribe that serves a tribal population of 17,308 citizens. Oneida Nation has a \$750 million annual economic impact in our region and is one of the largest employers in Brown and Outagamie Counties, with approximately half of our 2,390-employee base being non-Oneida individuals from neighboring communities.

Our government provides an array of services to our community, employees and tribal citizens including healthcare, behavioral health services, police protection, housing, public works, sewer and water infrastructure, family and child welfare services, environmental health/safety, banking, childcare, education and educational programming, food security, transportation, and much more.

**Exempt Tribal Programs from funding pauses and staffing reduction**

As the current Administration works to implement new policies, we urge Congress to work with tribes to educate administration officials as to our unique government-to-government relationship and the use of federal resources to fulfill the treaty and trust responsibility to Tribal Nations.

The United States fulfills its trust and treaty obligations through both the direct delivery of Tribal programs and services and through the provision of federal funding to Tribal Nations. These funds help us deliver essential tribal programs including healthcare, public safety, and education. These programs are not discretionary - they are legal obligations rooted in treaties, trust obligations, the U.S. Constitution, and long-standing federal statutes.

Our request is to make it clear that all federal programs that serve tribes should be exempt from funding pauses and staffing reductions. Clear guidance from Congress and the Administration is needed to protect tribes from inadvertent harm and to ensure that tribal access to federal resources appropriated by Congress is not interrupted.

**Support and Expand Tribal Self-Governance**

As Congress considers policies to increase efficiency and reduce bureaucracy, I would like to point out a successful Indian policy that can help achieve these goals – Tribal Self-Governance. Tribal Self-Governance reduces federal bureaucracy, expands local decision-making and control, gives

tribes greater flexibility to redesign programs, and plan for the long-term. This has led to better services and improved health, welfare, and quality of life for tribal citizens.

Self-Governance has been transformative for the Oneida Nation, providing for greater control over our healthcare programs and law enforcement which has allowed us to focus our efforts on prevention and empowered our Nation to build capacity by training our own citizens to fulfill these roles.

The Nation strongly encourages Congress to expand Tribal Self-Governance authority to other federal agencies that serve tribes, including, authorizing Self-Governance demonstration projects for tribal programs within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and authorizing permanent Self-Governance authority at the USDA for the Food Distribution Self-Determination Demonstration Project.

### **Address Tribal Law Enforcement Disparities**

The Oneida Nation is proud to operate our own police department, covering the reservation boundaries of over 100 square miles and over 27,000 residents. We have established collaborative relationships and parity with local law enforcement agencies through intergovernmental agreements, and our officers are cross deputized by county sheriffs. Unfortunately, tribal law enforcement remains extremely underfunded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs with Oneida Nation receiving less than \$140,000 annually for law enforcement through its 638 Self-Governance compact. This covers less than 3% of the annual operating cost of the Oneida Police Department. The current funding covers the partial salary of one police officer, out of 30+ positions in the police department. Last year alone, the Nation contributed over \$5 million dollars to operate our Police Department. We are fortunate to have the resources to cover these costs, but many other tribes throughout Indian Country do not. Even with our budget contributions, our Police Department still has unmet needs that remain unfunded.

Tribes in Public Law 280 states, like Oneida Nation, also face the misperception that we do not have public safety needs. This couldn't be further from the truth. Our Police Department responds to thousands of calls for service each year within the boundaries of the Reservation, with over 18,000 calls in 2023 alone. Due to lack of funding, our Police Department is consistently short staffed. This is a public safety concern. Operating at minimums only allows us to respond to (1) serious call, accident, or medical situation at a time. With additional public safety funding, we would be able to hire more officers providing a better service to our community, as well as expand our programming to hire a community resource officer to help prevent and deter crime.

Oneida Nation strongly supports increased Bureau of Indian Affairs Law Enforcement funding for all tribal public safety programs, including those in Public Law 280 states. Increased tribal law enforcement funding would provide transformational relief to address the systemic public safety issues facing our tribal nations.

There are dozens of other vitally important programs within the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill that are important to Oneida Nation; however, in the interest of time,

I will conclude my remarks here. Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to working with you.

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

