

**Testimony of John Johson, Sr., President  
Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians Before the  
House Appropriations Subcommittee  
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Regarding FY 2027 BIA, BIE, IHS & EPA Accounts  
March 17, 2026**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am John Johnson, Sr., President of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians. I am joined by members of our Tribal Council. We represent over 9,000 Tribal members and descendants, the majority of whom live on our 144 square mile reservation, Waswaagoning, in northern Wisconsin. Thank you for inviting me to testify. I submit our testimony for FY 2027 appropriations and urge this Subcommittee to make substantial increases to the BIA, BIE, IHS, and EPA accounts that support Tribal needs concerning public safety, education, healthcare, and the protection of the lands and waters that are critical to our members.

This Subcommittee has been a bulwark of support to Tribes by increasing appropriations that reflect the United States' trust responsibilities to the Indian Nations and to our citizens. Despite the overwhelming success of the Federal policy of Indian self-determination and Tribal self-governance over the last 56 years, rural Indian Tribes face growing disparities in public safety, healthcare, education, housing and economic development opportunities.

Tribes renew our treaty obligations to the United States with every Native son and Native daughter who volunteers to serve in the United States Armed Services in numbers disproportionate to our population. We further renew our treaty obligations by assuming contractible programs and services of the Department of the Interior and Department of Health and Human Services under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. We are good stewards of Federal appropriations. We contract programs even though we know that the Federal funds we receive are inadequate to meet growing Tribal needs. Yet we do it anyway. Our Tribe, like so many other Tribes, augment the Federal appropriations with Tribal general revenues to better staff and operate essential government services than the Federal agencies can do with annual appropriations. But our subsidizing Federal appropriations comes at a cost; we must defer or underfund other needs.

Every American can contribute to the betterment of their family, their community, and the Nation, and can do so best when they are given the tools to succeed. Give us the financial tools and we will help lift up our members to realize their fullest potential.

**Please lift Department hiring freezes** - We ask this Subcommittee to urge the White House to lift remaining hiring freezes at the Department of the Interior, Department of Health and Human Services, and EPA, especially for positions that are critical to Tribes assuming federal program duties under ISDEAA contracts and other agreements with Federal agencies. Expired 120-day details and staff vacancies, especially among warranted Awarding Officers, delay the award of program funds and contract support costs that we require to operate assumed programs and services under the ISDEAA.

After government shutdowns and continuing resolutions for FY 2026, Congress completed

appropriations for BIA, BIE, IHS, and EPA for the current fiscal year. Despite the requests from Tribal leaders, these accounts saw, at best, modest single digit increases over the FY 2024 and FY 2025 enacted levels. The increases, while helpful, are well below the levels we require to address program disparities in Indian country. If we are retain the valued program staff we recruit and hire, we must be competitive with surrounding towns, cities, county and state governments or we face a revolving door of providing experience to new entrants into the workforce only to lose them in a few years as they take better paying jobs with higher salaries and better benefits packages than Tribes can provide. We see this in law enforcement, healthcare, and social service hires.

If Congress wants to see meaningful changes to public safety, education, healthcare, and natural resource development on Indian reservations, Congress must provide across-the-board increases to BIA, BIE, IHS, and EPA accounts that provide funds to Tribes that assume the services and programs of these agencies. Here are specific funding requests for FY 2027 that we respectfully ask you to consider:

**Increase BIA Public Safety and Justice Services Funding** - Our biggest request is that this Subcommittee dramatically increase appropriations to the Public Safety and Justice accounts in the BIA budget for FY 2027. In a 2021 report to Congress issued by the BIA, law enforcement in Indian Country is underfunded by approximately \$1.5 billion dollars. In the last Congress, NCAI testified before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee on the need for enactment of the **Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act**, noting that Federal appropriations for public safety and justice met about 13% of the \$3.0 billion dollars estimated to address the true needs in Indian country for public safety officers, corrections officers, Tribal prosecutors, judges, and other personnel to meet the growing needs of Indian country. To date, the **Parity for Tribal Law Enforcement Act** has yet to pass Congress. The bill was reintroduced this year in the House and Senate. No hearing has yet been held in the House or Senate this Session. The bill would permit Tribal Law Enforcement Officers, after meeting requirements similar to BIA and other Federal law enforcement officers, to enforce Federal criminal laws on Indian reservations, and receive parity for Federal retirement and pension benefits enjoyed by Federal law enforcement officials. Until Congress passes the measure, please increase appropriations in the Public Safety and Justice account.

Eleven (11) Tribal police officers patrol our 144-square mile reservation and respond to three times as many service calls as do law enforcement in neighboring counties that operate with a police force three times as large. Since I last testified, we lost five members of our community to suspected fentanyl and fentanyl-related overdose. We need more police to patrol our reservation. Tribal police work cooperatively with Vilas County Sheriff's Department, the Vilas County Dispatch Center, Woodruff Police Department, Minocqua Police Department, State Crime Labs of Madison and Wausau, Wisconsin State Patry, and the Wisconsin Department of Justice to name just a few of our partnering agencies. But Tribal police are often the first responders to a crime scene. We request more funding to permit them to do their difficult jobs safely so they can return home to their families at the end of each shift.

**Increase BIA Human Services Funds and Double the Appropriation for the Tiwahe Program** - In the \$169-million-dollar Human Services accounts, we request a significant increase for BIA Social Services that we contract under the ISDEAA, and we request that the Subcommittee double the appropriation for the Tiwahe Program so that more Tribes can participate in the program that

is a proven success. The Tiwahe Program is wholly consistent with this Administration's goal to remove regulatory barriers so Tribal administrators can focus on program performance.

To keep Indian children out of foster homes, and reduce their trauma, we must find alternatives to incarceration for their parents, or those who struggle to find jobs, or who require mental health and substance abuse counseling. Tiwahe Program funds permit participating Tribes to more easily use available funds to provide alternatives to incarceration, counseling services, parenting skills, job training, and other services. If you want to improve the health and safety of Indian children, help Tribes keep young Indian families together through culturally appropriate counseling, training, and other services funded with Tiwahe Program funds.

**Increase Trust-Natural Resources Management Program Funds** - We request at least a 20% increase to the \$51-million-dollar Rights Protection Implementation Program and the \$19-million-dollar Tribal Management/Development Program within the Trust-Natural Resources Management accounts to improve Tribal capabilities to manage our natural resources. These accounts are important to the Lac du Flambeau Band and to the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) which serves eleven Ojibwe Tribes in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan that reserved hunting, fishing, and gathering rights in the 1836, 1837, 1842, and 1854 Treaties with the United States government. Like GLIFWC, we are committed to the careful management and protection of our natural resources and the preservation of such resources within our Ceded Territory, where the Ojibwe reserved Treaty rights to hunt, fish, and gather.

In 2023, and continuing to the present, our Tribal Natural Resources staff identified a highly aggressive aquatic invasive species, Eurasian watermilfoil, in the bay near the Tribal boat launch on White Sand Lake. A milder climate did not kill back the plant, but with the use of a floating containment boom and hand harvesting, the invasive plant was reduced. However, without more personnel to prevent unregulated watercraft access into the bay, and to inspect the containment boom, the invasive species has spread beyond the landing bay and as far as the northernmost shoreline of White Sand Lake.

**Bureau of Indian Education** - We have testified previously to the benefits of the Johnson-O'Malley Assistance Grants program and Native language immersion classes that permits Native youth to receive culturally appropriate programs in school. At \$20 million dollars for FY 2026, the same level as FY 2025, we believe the JOM Program is inadequately funded and request at least a 25% increase for FY 2027 for it and for Native language programs. Our student count alone for JOM grew by over 25% to 1,000 students just last year.

With a growing youth population, we further request at least a 25% increase in the \$43-million-dollar Post-Secondary Scholarships and Adult Education Program. There was no increase to this program provided in the current FY 2026 appropriation. Even with the Tribe's 50% subsidy to scholarships for 100 Tribal members, we continue to fall short of meeting the tuition needs of our students. Let us not shortchange America's future because we did not invest sufficiently in our youth, including American Indian and Alaska Native youth.

**Indian Health Service** - The Tribe is grateful to this Subcommittee for providing advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service account for the last few years. Advance appropriations to IHS and Tribes assuming healthcare services under the ISDEAA has ensured the

continuity of care to Tribal members and other eligible beneficiaries.

Tribal leaders and the National Indian Health Board have consistently testified that appropriations for IHS should be four to five times their current level if we are make significant progress to improve healthy outcomes for Native people. Please ensure the growth of IHS appropriations for FY 2027 and the safeguarding of Tribal eligibility to bill Medicare, Medicaid, VA, and other third-party payors for the services we provide to our patients. Without Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, our health services and staffing would be a fraction of what they are. Even with these reimbursements, our unmet healthcare needs are significant.

Last May, our Peter Christensen Health Center renewed its accreditation for another three-year term from the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care. Accreditation distinguishes this primary out-patient care center from many other out-patient facilities through its adherence to rigorous standards of care and safety. We provide medical services with physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners, laboratory, radiology & imaging, optical services, pharmacy services, community health and public health services, including diabetes management, medical nutrition services, Women Infant and Children (WIC), environmental health services, chiropractic services, physical and occupational therapy, and purchased referred care to eligible beneficiaries. Last year, with over 3,500 active patients, the Peter Christensen Health Center recorded around 20,000 patient visits. Nearly 20% of our patient population has diabetes. We continue to face challenges to recruit and retain specialty care providers. As a result, we must schedule appointments 3-4 months out due to staff shortages. Patients that cannot wait often must drive over 100 miles to appointments off-reservation.

**Increase Funding for Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Projects on Reservations; Dedicate IHS Facilities Construction funds for replacement projects** – Within our 86,000+ acre reservation, we have over 260 lakes, 65 miles of streams, and 24,000 acres of wetland. Our wastewater systems and sewage lagoons (four lagoons totaling approximately 38.4 acres in size) are at, or over capacity. To date, and despite meeting with IHS officials at the headquarters and Bemidji Area Office last year, the IHS has not proposed a plan or identified Facilities funds to address our growing wastewater and drinking water problems. The IHS Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS) prioritizes unserved areas for water, sewer, and septic systems over other areas that require replacement of these systems due to age. Please increase funding so that both new homes and homes served by leaky waterlines or septic tanks that have reached their useful life can be served. Addressing these infrastructure issues maintains reservation housing and reduces overcrowding on our reservation.

**Increase Tribal set-asides and State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) in the EPA budget** – We thank the Committee for its support for funding State and Tribal Assistance Grants, including funding for Clean Water Act Section 106 Pollution Control and Section 319 Nonpoint Source, Brownfields, and Clean Air Act programs.

**Increase Funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)** – We thank the Committee for its support of EPA’s Geographic Programs, including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which funds operations of GLIFWC, which provides services to the Band and other Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan Ojibwe Tribes. **Miigwech.**