



Tribal Education  
Adult Education  
Adult Vocational Training

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
White Mountain Apache Tribe  
P.O. Box 999  
Whiteriver, Arizona 85941  
Phone: (928) 338-6080 Fax: (928) 338-1183



Higher Education  
ORBS / Job Corp  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Johnson O'Malley Program

Testimony of Derrick W. Leslie  
Director, White Mountain Apache Tribal Education Department  
Chairperson, White Mountain Apache Tribal Health Board

Before the United States House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

Da Go Te and greetings. My name is Derrick W. Leslie. I am of the Red Horizontal People, Dishchiidin, born for the Mesquite People, Iyayy'aiye, from Turkey Creek. I appear today as Director of the White Mountain Apache Tribal Education Department and as the Chair for my Tribe's Health Advisory Board.

As Tribal Education Director I oversee programs supporting education and career pathways: Adult Vocational Training, Adult Education, Office of Higher Education, Johnson O'Malley, and the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program. The VR Program is essential for Tribal members with disabilities — helping them access education, training, and employment. These programs require stable, predictable federal funding and statutory protections like informed choice and due process. Any changes to funding, grant administration, or oversight could directly harm individuals with disabilities who rely on these services. We urge Congress to maintain continuity of funding and to preserve Rehabilitation Act principles while respecting tribal sovereignty and federal trust and treaty obligations during and after changes in administration of funds as proposed in the Inter-Agency Agreement between the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Interior.

Regarding the Johnson O'Malley Program, we appreciate passage of the Modernization Act and the updated student count. However, funding history shows a long-term decline in per-pupil support. For my Tribe, per-pupil JOM funding fell from \$155.25 in FY1979 to \$125 in 1995 and to only \$64 by FY2024, even as the national student count grew from 171,290 in 1979 to 317,102 for 2025–2026. More students are served but per-pupil funding has steadily decreased. To maintain our per-pupil investment from 1979 it would require approximately \$49.2 million for JOM Programs. Without increased appropriations, contractors will receive less funding while serving more students. We support the National Indian Education Association and the National Congress of American Indians in calling for increased JOM funding.

Impact Aid is a critical funding stream for the Whiteriver Unified School District because much of our land is federal trust land and not subject to local property tax. Delays or reductions in Impact Aid directly affect classroom resources, staffing, and services for Apache students. We urge timely, full funding.



Tribal Education  
Adult Education  
Adult Vocational Training

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
White Mountain Apache Tribe  
P.O. Box 999  
Whiteriver, Arizona 85941  
Phone: (928) 338-6080 Fax: (928) 338-1183



Higher Education  
ORBS / Job Corp  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Johnson O'Malley Program

School facilities in the Bureau of Indian Education system remain a serious concern. Dishchii'bikoh Community School in Cibecue, which was built in 1991; John F. Kennedy Day School in Cedar Creek which was built in 1969; and the Theodore Roosevelt School in Fort Apache which was built in 1877 as a military post, all need replacement facilities. Congress has previously directed the Bureau to develop long-term facilities planning modeled on DOD school modernization processes, and recent committee reports have emphasized the need for safe, functional, and accessible school facilities. We support continued implementation of comprehensive facilities planning and funding to address these urgent needs.

A major health priority for our Tribe is replacement of the Whiteriver Indian Hospital. The current hospital, completed in 1979, is outdated and cannot adequately support modern healthcare delivery or expanding medical technologies. The Indian Health Service Health Care Facilities Construction Priority List — developed in the early 1990s through tribal consultation — ranked our hospital for replacement. We thank the Committee and Congress for allocating final appropriations for our new hospital; we expect to break ground later this year.

In closing, our federal trust and treaty responsibilities require that Tribal communities receive predictable, adequate funding for education, health, and disability services. Please support stable appropriations for Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, increased funding for Johnson O'Malley, timely Impact Aid, BIE school modernization, and construction for the Whiteriver Indian Hospital.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Ahiyi'e.

