



**TESTIMONY OF THE
LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY BANDS OF ODAWA INDIANS PRESENTED BY THE
HONORABLE WINNAY WEMIGWASE, CHAIRPERSON
TO
THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

March 17, 2026

Summary of Agency/Program and Funding Requests

- 1. Indian Health Service (IHS) and Tribal Healthcare Funding***
 - 2. Tribal Public Safety and Law Enforcement Funding***
 - 3. Funding for Housing***
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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Thank you Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (Tribe). Our Reservation is located in Michigan's Lower Peninsula within Charlevoix and Emmet Counties. In 1994, Congress restored the federal recognition of the Tribe through Public Law 103-324, 108 Stat. 2156 (Sept. 21, 1994), recognizing that the Tribe is a political successor to the signatories of the 1836 Treaty of Washington and the 1855 Treaty of Detroit. Since the Tribe's restoration, our government has been deeply committed to providing for the safety and well-being of our more than 4,700 citizens. Funding from the federal government supports many of the Tribe's efforts to build governmental capacity and serve our members. The Tribe sincerely appreciates the Subcommittee's commitment to providing much-needed federal funding for Indian Country.

Reliable and timely appropriation of federal funding for all tribal programs is essential to upholding the federal government's trust responsibilities to Tribal Nations. In particular, the Tribe requests that the Subcommittee prioritize funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS) and tribal

healthcare, tribal law enforcement and public safety, and tribal housing. We also respectfully request that this Subcommittee advocate to increase federal funding for all tribal programs.

I. IHS AND TRIBAL HEALTHCARE FUNDING

The Tribe provides healthcare services to its members through contracts with IHS entered into pursuant to the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA). These contracts support the Tribe's operation of its Mina Mskiki Gumik Health Clinic and the Crooked Tree Wellness Clinic located in Petoskey, Michigan. The clinics serve members and descendants of any federally recognized tribe within a 27-county service area. We also serve a portion of the local non-Native underserved population given the critical need for providers that participate in the Medicaid program. Services provided include family medicine, women's medicine, pediatrics, community health, behavioral health, dental health, Traditional Healing, and pharmacy services.

In *Becerra v. San Carlos Apache Tribe* and *Becerra v. Northern Arapaho Tribe*, the Supreme Court determined that IHS is required to pay eligible contract support costs incurred by Tribes and Tribal organizations that expend program income (*i.e.*, revenue from third-party payers like Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers) under their ISDEAA contracts and compacts. Following the *Becerra* decision, IHS conducted a series of tribal consultations to develop a methodology for calculating contract support costs incurred by Tribes and Tribal organizations on such expenditures of program income. As part of that process, IHS confirmed that it would follow the established requirements and procedures of the ISDEAA and the Contract Disputes Act to evaluate claims seeking additional contract support costs for contracts awarded prior to 2024. Like many other tribes, the Tribe is currently pursuing Contract Disputes Act claims with the IHS for unpaid contract support costs on expenditures for third-party reimbursements for years prior to 2024.

Becerra makes clear that the United States has a mandatory obligation to provide enough funding to ensure full payment of claims relating to already-awarded contracts and future contracts, and we underscore that such funding is absolutely critical to the successful operation of tribal healthcare programs. The Tribe very much appreciates that in FY 2026, Congress provided an indefinite appropriation to fully fund IHS contract support costs. At a minimum, we urge Congress to continue the indefinite appropriation to fully fund contract support costs in FY 2027. Additionally, we respectfully request that contract support costs be treated as a mandatory appropriation rather than a discretionary one so that IHS may continue to meet its obligations under *Becerra* without negatively impacting the broader IHS budget.

IHS is chronically underfunded overall and often falls short of meeting the healthcare needs of Native people. The National Indian Health Board estimates that the amount needed to fully fund the IHS is \$73 billion in FY 2027.¹ Yet, the total amount appropriated to IHS in FY 2026 was only \$8.1 billion. To help address this shortfall in IHS funding, Tribes have found ways to collect

¹ See National Indian Health Board FY 2027 Budget Request, available at <https://www.nihb.org/resource/fy-2027-ntbfwg-budget-book-2/>.

reimbursement from insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare for medical and pharmacy services provided. But changes to the Medicaid program and proposed changes to the 340b discount drug program jeopardize that reimbursement and could have a detrimental impact on the services that we are able to provide in our communities. For all of these reasons, we request that Congress increase funding for IHS to fully meet the federal government's trust obligation to provide healthcare services to Native Americans. At a minimum, Congress must continue to fund IHS and tribal healthcare programs at current FY 2026 enacted levels and maintain advance appropriations for IHS. Advance appropriations are critical to ensuring lifesaving tribal healthcare programs can continue without interruption in the event of a federal government shutdown.

II. TRIBAL PUBLIC SAFETY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT FUNDING

The Tribe's police department and law enforcement officers are at the center of the Tribe's efforts to protect Tribal members and all persons on the Tribe's lands. But they face significant challenges. Because the Tribe suffered termination, its original land base was lost, and since its restoration it has had to rebuild its Reservation by acquiring parcels of land over time from willing sellers. As a result, today, the Tribe's Reservation consists of small parcels scattered chiefly throughout Emmet, Charlevoix, and Cheboygan Counties. The Tribe's law enforcement officers are required to patrol and serve within the large geographic reach of all three counties. The Tribe's police department relies heavily on federal funding to support daily operations, but for FY 2026, the Tribe's BIA law enforcement contract provided only \$150,471—enough to cover only one officer's salary and benefits and a portion of a patrol vehicle. Further, as is common across Indian Country, the Tribe struggles to recruit and retain officers due to the rural nature of the Tribe's Reservation and the lack of affordable housing. Making matters appreciably worse, the Tribe's ability to generate its own funds to pay and retain officers has been severely impacted by declining revenue from our gaming operations – the apparently unregulated prediction market industry that allows customers to bet on almost anything is severely impacting the tribal gaming industry and the revenue it provides to fund tribal governmental services.

In February 2026, the General Accountability Office released a report assessing recruitment and retention of law enforcement at the federal, tribal, state, and local levels.² As part of the report, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) indicated that not having adequate law enforcement staffing jeopardizes public safety throughout Indian Country, and noted that BIA continues to have limited capacity to patrol tribal lands and conduct criminal investigations. The lack of adequate federal funding is a root cause of law enforcement recruitment and retention issues across Indian Country. Without adequate funding, BIA and tribal law enforcement are unable to provide competitive salaries and benefits to recruit and retain qualified officers.

² Government Accountability Office, Law Enforcement Officers: Observations on Recruitment and Retention at the Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Levels, February 3, 2026, available at <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108495>.

According to a February 2024 report released by BIA³ pursuant to the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010, the funding needed to provide for public safety and justice services in Indian Country in 2021 was approximately \$3.509 billion, including \$1.7 billion for law enforcement, \$284.2 million for existing detention/corrections programs, and \$1.5 billion for tribal courts. Law enforcement, detention and corrections, and tribal courts are fundamental elements of public safety and the continued underfunding of these services has led to higher rates of violence in Indian Country. The funding needed to support public safety and justice programs in Indian Country has only increased since 2021. Although the Tribe appreciates that Congress appropriated \$570 million to support BIA public safety and justice programs in FY 2026, a \$14.5 million increase from FY 2025, \$570 million is wholly inadequate to cover the public safety and justice needs of Indian Country. A significant increase in funding for BIA public safety and justice programs is urgently needed in FY 2027.

II. FUNDING FOR HOUSING

The Tribe's headquarters and many of our members live in the Cities of Petoskey and Harbor Springs in Emmet County, Michigan. Both cities are summer resort destinations in which housing prices have been driven up by people buying properties for vacation homes, causing a severe affordable housing crisis. In 2023 an independent Housing Needs Assessment estimated that Emmet County suffers from an overall housing gap of 3,370 housing units, identifying the need for 865 rental units and 2,505 for-sale units.⁴ Moreover, the Needs Assessment confirms that the greatest rental need in Emmet County is for units costing less than \$1,655 per month so that they would be affordable to households earning only 80% or less of the Average Median Household Income (\$67,354). Additionally, the Housing Needs Assessment confirms that the for-sale market in Emmet County is heavily dominated by higher-priced listings with over 75% of available housing units priced at \$300,000 or above. The housing crisis in the region only continues to grow.

While we understand that this Subcommittee does not have jurisdiction over appropriations for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), we respectfully urge you to share with your colleagues on the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies the need to increase funding for Indian housing programs. The lack of affordable housing is an acute barrier to the recruitment and retention of physicians, law enforcement, and other professionals who we need to serve our community. In FY 2026, the HUD Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) program was level funded at \$1.1 billion. Since its creation in 1996 through the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act, the IHBG grant has served as the bedrock of affordable housing in Indian Country, and IHBG funding is essential to the Tribe's ability to develop, operate, and manage affordable homes and rental units.

³ Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Justice Services, Report to the Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country, 2021 (Feb. 2024), available at, https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/2021_tloa_report_final_508_compliant.pdf.

⁴ Housing North, 2023 Housing Needs Assessment Emmet County Data Summary, available at <https://www.housingnorth.org/housing-data#HNACOUNTY>.