

**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL CONNERS
CHIEF OF THE SAINT REGIS MOHAWK TRIBE**

**Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related
Agencies for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness
Hearing Days on March 17 & 18, 2026**

Tekeninonhwerá:tons | Greetings Chairman Mike Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Honorable Members of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies:

On behalf of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (SRMT or the Tribe), we are submitting this written testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to advocate for our Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 appropriation priorities.

Our Tribe is a federally recognized tribal government responsible for promoting the health, safety, education and welfare of all our community members. The Tribe is located on the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory in New York and has over 16,580 enrolled tribal members, with approximately half of these tribal members living on the Reservation. As our territory exists on both sides of the United States-Canada border, we have an increased need for resources to support our law enforcement and public safety services. Moreover, because of three off-Reservation Superfund sites located directly upstream and upwind from where we draw our drinking water and reside, we heavily rely on programs funded through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to promote the health and well-being of our members.

For these reasons, and more, the SRMT is requesting that your Subcommittee consider the following requests when drafting the FY 2027 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill:

1. **Direct the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI), Including the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and the Indian Health Service (IHS), to Uphold its Treaty and Trust Obligations to Federally Recognized Tribal Governments.** This is a turbulent time for our country. As the complex interplay between Congress, the President, and the Courts continues to play out, we need your help to ensure the BIA, BIE, and IHS uphold their trust obligations to us by fully funding our critical programs. Congress has a trust obligation to the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe just as much as the Executive Branch holds and FY 2027 appropriations are perhaps some of the most powerful tools for keeping the federal government accountable in meeting these obligations.
2. **Increase Funding for BIA Public Safety Programs - Tribal Courts, Tribal Priority Allocations, Law Enforcement, Criminal Investigations, Police Services, and Detention/Corrections.** As previously mentioned, the SRMT's territory exists on both sides of the United States-Canada border. In partnership with various state and federal agencies, the Tribe provides extensive public safety and justice services to address cross-boundary services in addition to providing public safety and justice services for tribal members residing on the

United States side of the border. However, additional funds are needed as public safety threats continue to grow. Moreover, given the impacts of increased public safety and justice services are needed more than ever.

- 3. Fully Fund the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education at \$27.1 Billion.** Indian Country programs are already critically underfunded, and Indian Country cannot afford additional cuts. This results in reduced healthcare services, weakened public safety efforts, and fewer educational opportunities for our members. On our reservation, there are over 1,000 school-aged children. Our well-being depends on robust funding to deliver programs and services promised in our Treaties with the federal government and other statutory authorities enacted by Congress.
- 4. Fully Fund the Indian Health Service (IHS) at \$63 Billion and Continue Advanced Appropriations to Protect Tribal Healthcare Services During the Threat of Government Shutdowns.** American Indian and Alaska Native people experience severe health disparities and chronic diseases at much higher rates than other populations. These conditions are compounded by the chronic underfunding of the Indian health system. The IHS received advanced appropriations for FY 2026; therefore, the majority of IHS-funded programs will remain funded and operational in the event of a lapse of appropriation. We urge the House to once again include advance appropriations for IHS in its FY 2027 Interior Appropriations bill. Funding uncertainties arising from continuing resolutions and government shutdowns destabilize the continuity of care needed to reduce these disparities and create more costs for the Indian health system. Advance Appropriations help alleviate negative effects upon the Indian health system arising from budget uncertainty.
- 5. Fund Tribal EPA Programs and Fully Fund the Removal of the GM dump in Massena, New York.** The Tribe is finalizing the work plan and budget for renewal of the next five-year Performance Partnership Agreement (PPA). The Tribe currently has 16 programs included in the PPA. The PPA streamlines the award of grant funds to the Tribe and allows flexibility for implementation. The PPA is an integral part of the Tribe's ability to implement environmental protection and self-governance.

The General Motors Superfund Site is in two northern New York counties on the St. Lawrence River. The site is adjacent to and upstream from our Reservation and homelands. There are some 4,000 Mohawks impacted by contaminated waters of the St. Lawrence River and its' tributaries. The community traditionally uses river waters and wetland areas for drinking water, subsistence practices, and cultural and ceremonial traditions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Alcoa, Reynolds, and General Motors factories in Massena dumped cancer-causing PCBs on the land near Akwesasne. GM also released PCBs into the St. Lawrence, Grasse, and Raquette Rivers nearby. For decades, chemicals caused severe health problems for some tribal members. A fully complete cleanup of the health hazard would provide ensure a safer community for our tribe.

Niawen (thank you) for taking the time to consider the FY 2027 appropriation requests of the Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe. We look forward to working with you as you implement measures to uphold

the federal trust obligation by fully funding the programs that positively impact our tribal communities the most.