



**Testimony of Oneida Nation Chairman, Tehassi tasi Hill  
Before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior,  
Environment, and Related Agencies  
March 18, 2026**

Shekoli Swakewku (Greetings Everyone), Honorable Chairman Cole and Ranking Member Delauro 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 approximately 17,246 citizens. Oneida Nation has a \$1 billion annual economic impact in Wisconsin and is one of the largest employers in Brown and Outagamie Counties, with approximately half of our 2,450-employee base being non-Oneida individuals from neighboring communities.

Our government provides an array of services to our community, employees and tribal citizens including governmental service programs, 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, food distribution, transportation, and much more.

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

The United States fulfills its trust and treaty obligations through both the direct delivery of Tribal programs and services, as well as through the provision of federal funding to Tribal Nations. These funds help us deliver essential services to our people 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.

We ask that Congress 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 for 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. Through Self-Governance compacts with United States Department of the Interior, Indian Health Service, and Department of Transportation, hundreds of tribal governments are delivering federal programs more effectively and more efficiently than the federal government had previously, all while meeting the unique needs of our tribal communities.

As a Self-Governance tribe, greater control over our healthcare programs and law enforcement has been transformational for Oneida Nation, allowing us to focus our efforts on prevention and building capacity by training our own citizens to fulfill these roles.

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. 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.

## Support for Head Start

Head Start is another program within HHS that would benefit from Self-Governance. Tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve nearly 20,000 children in 152 programs across 26 states. Tribal Head Start programs address health, education, family, and community needs in a holistic manner that incorporates traditional native learning styles and cultural practices. We are proud that our Oneida Head Start Program incorporates Oneida language and culture into our curriculum, which is key to building confidence and success in the students and families we serve. Tribal Head Start programs play a critical role in providing AI/AN children with a strong foundation for life-long academic achievement and personal resiliency. In recognition of the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to tribes, there must be no elimination or cuts to the Tribal Head Start Program.

## Underfunding at Bureau of Indian Affairs

Another priority for the Nation is shifting Indian Affairs programs out of the discretionary budget and making funding mandatory. The current system results in unpredictable funding levels, ranging for annual cuts to large increases, which in turn makes it more challenging for Tribal governments to manage their own budgets and plan for the future. Annual adjustments should also be applied to account for inflation and changes in jurisdiction or eligibility as identified by datasets mutually agreed upon

by tribal governments and the federal government. In the meantime, advanced appropriations for the entire Indian Affairs budget should be put in place until its spending is made mandatory. This would eliminate the uncertainty Tribal Nations face due to continuing resolutions and shutdowns.

Funding levels themselves are also an issue in nearly every agency, and, the Bureau of Indian Affairs is severely underfunded. The funding amounts we receive for almost every line item are the same as they were when we first negotiated them in 1994. The current amounts cover less than 1% to 8% of each BIA program we have assumed. We have received pay cost increases but that doesn't even come close to inflation. Simply put, Congress and the federal government are not meeting trust and treaty responsibilities at Indian Affairs. Congress should carefully review the Tribal Interior Budget Council budget recommendations and identify resources to meet the needs of Indian Country.

Our programs and services are not only impacted by lack of direct funding through our self-governance compacts, but also by the lack of funding and staffing at the regional offices. There is a high vacancy rate at the Midwest Region. Tribes are seeing delays in receiving title status reports, processing of fee to trust applications, and more. This diminishes trust between our tribal members and the federal government, as well as impacts the success of our home ownership support programs, including administering the HUD Section 184 programming. For the Tribal Government itself, this also creates unnecessary delays that harm our economic development activities.

#### Support for Tribal Law Enforcement

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've 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 salary of one police officer and the partial salary of another 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 a number of unmet needs that we have not been able to fund to date.

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 received over 23,000 calls for service in 2025 of which they responded to

over 10,000 within the boundaries of the Reservation. Due to lack of funding, our Police Department is consistently short staffed. This is a public safety concern. Operating at minimum staffing levels 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 and neighboring non-tribal communities.

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.

### IHS and Healthcare Funding

As we work to address these public safety and environmental challenges, it is equally important to recognize that the health and well-being of our citizens underpins every aspect of our Nation's stability and growth. Oneida Nation is located within the IHS Bemidji Area, and we have had a Compact and Funding Agreement with the US Department of Health and Human Services since 1997. Our Comprehensive Health Division provides health care services to a user population of over 15,000 patients. The ability of Tribal Nations and IHS to address essential health care needs is hindered when full funding is not available at the beginning of the fiscal year. We appreciate the inclusion of advanced appropriations for the IHS in recent budget bills, which has protected our healthcare programs from the impacts of government shutdowns and short-term continuing resolutions. However, Advanced appropriation is only authorized by Congress year-by-year, and tribes need a more permanent solution. Oneida Nation strongly supports congressional legislation that permanently authorizes advanced appropriations for IHS. We consider this to be an important first step as we move towards the long-term goal of stable, mandatory funding for the IHS

The Broken Promises Report shows that the federal government is not committed to the providing level of service needed for Indian Country. The current structure does not take into account technology, inflation, growth, need, and more. The IHS and tribes are subject to continuing resolutions, government shutdowns, sequestration; all of which are detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of our communities.

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.