

**Written Testimony of Frank Star Comes Out, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe
“American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Days”
on the FY2027 Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service Budget
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 18, 2026**

Recommendations:

1. Reset our base funding for Law Enforcement and fully fund our Law Enforcement at the level of need identified in the Tribal Law and Order Act reports.
2. Provide \$73 billion to the Indian Health Service (IHS) for FY 2027 and provide advance appropriations for FY 2028. *Including:* \$2.0 million for the Special Diabetes Programs for Indians (SDPI); and *Including:* \$450,000 for Oglala Sioux Tribe — Audiology & Otitis Media Program (OST-AOMP)
3. Provide \$331,000 for Johnson O’Malley (JOM) and \$313,000 for the Tribe’s Education Agency
4. Provide \$2.5 million for the Tribe’s Environmental Protection Program
5. Consistent with the United States’ treaty and trust responsibilities, exempt all Tribal programs and funding designated for serving Indian Country from funding and staffing cuts, including programs offered by BIA, BIE, IHS, and all Tribal offices for all agencies.
6. Change approach to funding Indian Country to provide continuous funding of programs.
7. Provide increases in all Tribal base funding programs.
8. Streamline processes for funding to reach us quicker, including via direct funding.
9. Prioritize the allocation of funding based on demonstrated need.

Introduction. The Oglala Sioux Tribe is a member of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires, known as the Great Sioux Nation). Our Reservation is roughly the size of Connecticut and very remote. It takes almost 2 hours to drive from Pine Ridge to Wanblee in the NE corner of our Reservation. We have more than 54,000 Tribal members. The chronic underfunding of Indian Country programs has taken an enormous toll on our Tribe and our citizens. The Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 cemented the United States’ obligations to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and we look to you to fulfill those obligations through the federal budget process. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to ensure full and adequate funding for programs that serve Tribal Nations and Native people. Any cuts to such programs, including cuts to staff, would be devastating given the historic severe underfunding of such programs.

Our Public Safety Crisis. Our Tribe has been and remains in the midst of a public safety crisis. This crisis stems, in large part, from the improper law enforcement base funding the BIA has provided to us and from its unwillingness to assign us an accurate service population. We appreciate the 2.6% increase for Public Safety and Justice in the final FY2026 enacted budget. This was one of more significant increases in the BIA budget. However, when divided among the many Tribal Nations only a miniscule amount of these funds will reach our Tribe. Any increase is welcome, but such an increase will not address our crisis. *We implore this Subcommittee to reset our base funding and our service population and start fully funding this essential governmental service at the level which the BIA already admits is necessary.* Our people should not have to wait over an hour for an emergency 911 call to be answered, or not have it answered at all. We need law enforcement officers with appropriate equipment and vehicles. An increase in our base will help with retention. We need safe schools; the number of weapons taken from our schools each

year is terrifying. The least expensive part of our law enforcement budget is salaries. The largest percentage must be spent on replacing or repairing federally mandated equipment, and for mandatory operating costs like gas, tires, employee tax contributions, and insurance. Annual inflation severely impacts our budget, leaving us with fewer officers, even when the dollar amount of our contract has increased. Our officers log up to 400 miles per shift. Thus, heightened gas prices devour our budget. Our Tribe needs a reset of our base funding for Law Enforcement. It is based on old and incorrect data. We need a **surge** in law enforcement funding that significantly outpaces inflation and rising costs. BIA admits that we are currently funded at just under 13% of actual need before inflation! This is unacceptable and needs to change. Also, Law Enforcement dollars must get to the places they are most needed.

Public Safety Corollary Needs: Tribal Courts, Detention Centers, Domestic Violence.

On-Reservation crime has a direct and very negative impact on our Tribal courts, our Tribal detention programs, and on our victims' services, all of which need to work in tandem. These programs need a comparable increase if we are going to make a dent in our public safety crisis. We request an additional \$2,000,000 to compensate staff and fund our Tribal court in Kyle, SD. In FY2024, our Tribal court had a backlog of over 6,000 cases. Additionally, because appeals are mandated by law, we are also asking for a minimum increase of \$2 million to cover costs of our Supreme Court. We also request an additional increase of \$4.8 million for additional staff, enhanced systems and supplies needed for our Department of Corrections to adequately operate our five detention facilities. Lastly, we need an increase of \$500,000 for our Domestic Violence Initiative for additional staff, safe houses, and operating costs.

Health Care. The health care of our members is of paramount importance and remains one of the highest priorities of our Tribe. The National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup's Request for the Indian Health Service (IHS) for FY2027 is \$73 billion to provide full and mandatory funding for IHS. The IHS needs adequate funding to recruit and retain healthcare providers and administrators to serve our Reservation, including the need to re-establish specialty care services for our people, rather than forcing them to travel off our Reservation to Rapid City or elsewhere for treatment that should be available closer to home. We are also requesting an additional \$2 million increase in SDPI. The Oglala Sioux Tribe Special Diabetes Program for Indians has provided screening services for students with parental consent and Presidential Fitness testing for several years. The requested increase will serve approximately 1,066 more students. We also need a surge of resources for mental and behavioral health services on our Reservation, including residential treatment and suicide prevention. We are also requesting \$450,000 for the OST-AOMP (Audiology and Otitis Media Program) to increase screening coverage, enhance onsite diagnostic capacity, and timely medical/ENT referral for children (especially ages 0–5).

Thank you for the FY2026 Sanitation Facilities Construction funding for upgrading many of our community water systems. We need about \$27 million to upgrade our Pine Ridge Village system. We also thank you for providing the advance appropriations for IHS for FY2027 and urge you to do the same going forward. We also need to make sure that payment for the IHS's legal obligations, such as contract support costs (CSC) and 105(l) lease payments, are not paid for at the expense of other Tribal programs. They should be moved to mandatory appropriations. Our view is that all Tribal programs should be mandatory appropriations. IHS appropriations should also include ample funding to improve and construct IHS facilities and to provide staff quarters for qualified staff to combat our chronic issues of recruitment and retention of talented

health care personnel. We stress that federal caselaw demonstrates the United States owes a treaty-based duty to our Tribe, as one of the signatory tribes to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, to provide our members with competent healthcare services. *See Rosebud Sioux Tribe v. United States*, 450 F. Supp. 3d 986, 1005 (D.S.D. 2020).

Social Services, Child Protective Services (CPS), ICWA Programs, Emergency Youth Shelter, General Assistance (GA), Burial Assistance, Tiwahe. BIA Social Services programs are essential to meeting our citizens' well-being needs and integral to improving public safety. Social services resources are critically necessary to aid our members dealing with the results of crime and violence, poverty, homelessness, domestic abuse, substance abuse, and food insecurity. We urge this Subcommittee to increase funding for the **GA** program, which provides funding to qualified individuals within our Tribal membership to help them meet their most essential needs: food, shelter, clothing, and utilities. We request an additional \$1 million in funding to meet the growing demand for our **ICWA** programs' services. This would be for additional caseworkers and to assist with kinship, paid placements and foster care placements. We also need \$5 million in additional funding for our **CPS** programs to cover the costs of hiring additional caseworkers, payments to emergency placements with a culturally appropriate residential treatment facility, and parent training. We request \$500,000 in more funding for our **Emergency Youth Shelter**, which serves over 76 youth each year. We need another \$500,000 for **BIA's Burial Assistance Program**, which, we are undercounted for. In 2025, we had 174 deaths. In 2026, we have had 57 already! This is already a third of our funding. Our Tribe's General Fund supplements the costs for off-Reservation deaths and /or for transporting members back to our Reservation for burial.

Tiwahe funding must be put into the following: HIP, tribal courts, detentions/correction, law enforcement, economic development, job placement training, emergency youth shelter, social services, ICWA, victim services to adhere to the original intent of repairing families and communities and reducing recidivism. As one of the new Tiwahe Demonstration Tribes, we have already seen improvements in strengthening collaboration across critical areas such as CPS and ICWA to safeguard our children. Our Tiwahe Navigators work with families throughout the child welfare process and connect them to services to receive the supports needed to stabilize families. We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to increase Tiwahe funding.

Probates. An influx of BIA probate resources must be targeted to our Reservation. Probate is in a crisis state. We have 1,350 estates to process for adjudications. OHA reportedly only has 7 judges for the whole country. Our people should not have to wait 6 years or more for probates to be resolved. Serious resources need to be applied to this compounding crisis.

Transportation/Road Maintenance Program. The chronic underfunding of BIA road maintenance seriously affects our members' daily lives. It hinders our access to healthcare, emergency services, economic opportunities, school, and religious and cultural ceremonies. Our federal funding for BIA Road Maintenance is woefully underfunded and it includes maintenance for BIA bridges on the National Bridge Inventory. Our Tribe maintains about 580 miles of BIA roads and we have 26 bridges. The funding is inadequate, especially given our severe weather conditions, which can consume up to 65% of our annual budget each winter. Funding is so tight that routine bridge maintenance is not performed until it is in a state of emergency. Road maintenance requires adequate equipment and trained crews as well. We request \$20 million in additional funding for our road maintenance program to cover critical costs, our needs for staffing, equipment, and data collection systems. We are also requesting \$775,200 for six 16-passenger

buses. This increase will provide much needed access to public transportation for the elderly, handicapped, college students and the local workforce of our Reservation

Economic Development. We request an additional \$500,000 in funding to support our Tribe's Credit and Finance Department, which we contracted from the BIA via P.L. 93-638. This funding will help us build on the program's success and support additional staff needed to increase outreach efforts and training, establish a data statistical reporting system, develop tourism codes, empower the next generation of entrepreneurs, and implement the program's "Hub and Spoke Concept" to accomplish the "OGLALA Sovereignty Plan." Additionally, investments in our job placement and training programs are crucial to investing in the future of our Nation's economy. We need an additional \$500,000 for our students to attend vocational schools and to cover associated costs for education, such as tools, supplies, and relocation.

Environmental Protection Program. We have many open dump sites and many abandoned trailer houses and homes located across our Reservation: sites that need to be cleaned up. \$500,000 is requested for this purpose so families can lease the reclaimed property for homes. We request \$2 million to establish a recycling facility. In the EPA 106 Water Pollution Control and General Assistance Program we need \$130,000 and \$150,000, respectively, for a field technician and to review and amend our environmental codes, which are outdated.

Natural Resources Programs, Water Resources Program. We request \$5 million in additional funding to cover our natural resources programs' needs for additional staff, equipment, outreach services (on and off reservation), identification cards, and a new building. We also request \$500,000 in additional funding to cover our water resource program's need for additional staff, developing our Tribal code governing this program, and to cover other project costs.

Housing Improvement Program (HIP). We request \$2 million in additional funding for the increased application of the four (4) categories of service for our HIP program. HIP provides direct services to some of the most vulnerable households on our Reservation where housing shortages, aging structures, and extreme poverty create urgent and on-going needs.

JOM. Our request for 2027 includes \$181,144.00 that the program was cut, plus another \$150,000.00 for the increasing number of students served and the cost of inflation. Our **Tribal Education Agency** needs \$313,000 to help it carry out its activities at schools that serve our children. Among other things, this agency provides professional development to staff, communications between the schools' administrators and Tribal officials, and prioritization of revitalizing the Lakota Language in our schools.

Higher Education, Early Intervention Program. We need an additional \$1 million to help cover our increased requests for higher educational grant assistance. Tuition costs are increasing yearly as are the number of our students applying for four-year college and graduate school programs. We also request an additional \$1 million in funding to help cover costs of our Early Intervention Program for special needs students. This program services 700 children and their families. This additional funding would help cover expenses to hire outreach workers, social workers, other special needs services, and a new building for the program.

Tribal Government Facility. We urge Congress to appropriate funds to assist the Tribe with constructing a new Tribal government facility, which we desperately need to house our Tribal Council chambers, our government offices, and to provide essential services to our community.

Aid to Tribal Government. We ask for \$370,000 for our Enrollment Department so we can more easily track our Tribal membership.