

Sac and Fox Nation

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**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE GEORGE THURMAN, PRINCIPAL CHIEF
SAC AND FOX NATION
SUBMITTED TO THE HOUSE COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE
AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON THE FY-2014 BUDGET FOR JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

March 21, 2013

Chairman Wolfe and distinguished Members of the Committee, my name is George L. Thurman, and I am the Principal Chief of the Sac and Fox Nation. I thank you for the opportunity to present the Sac and Fox Nation's testimony before this esteemed Committee. *We appreciate your dedication to Indian programs and respectfully submit a Tribal Specific Budget Request in the amount of \$4.8 million to fully fund the Sac and Fox Nation Juvenile Detention Center.* We understand the fiscal constraints of the Country and together we can provide a future that has many opportunities for self-sufficiency through Self-Governance.

About the Sac and Fox Nation

The Sac and Fox Nation is headquartered in Stroud, Oklahoma, and our Tribal jurisdictional area covers Lincoln, Payne, and Pottawatomie Counties. Of the 4,000 enrolled Tribal members, 2,600 live in Oklahoma. We are proud to pay tribute to a Sac and Fox descendent and Great Native American, Jim Thorpe. One of the most revered Olympic athletes who has ever represented the United States; Mr. Thorpe won the pentathlon and decathlon in the 1912 Olympics.

Tribal Specific Budget Requests - \$4.8 Million for Juvenile Detention Center

The passage of the Tribal Law and Order Act was applauded by the Sac & Fox Nation because we saw this as the opportunity for the federal government to finally fulfill the commitment to the Nation and fully fund our Juvenile Detention Center (JDC). In 1994, the Sac and Fox Nation Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) opened its doors after years of planning and construction made possible by funding from the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs. The JDC is the first juvenile facility designed for American Indians/Alaska Natives as well as the first juvenile facility developed under P.L. 100-472, the Self-Governance Demonstration Project Act. The JDC is a full service, 24 hour juvenile detention facility that provides basic detention services to all residents to insure their health, safety and welfare and programs tailored to meet the specific needs of our clients.

These programs include behavioral management, substance abuse, spiritual, cultural, self-esteem, arts and crafts, health and fitness, horticulture, nutrition, life skills, counseling and educational programs. The 39 Tribes included in the Southern Plains Region are willing to support the JDC but due to underfunding and staffing shortages, the JDC cannot accommodate the detention needs of the regional Tribes.

In FY 2013 appropriations testimony provided by Assistant Secretary Larry Echo Hawk, he requested \$6.5 million for Detention/Correction and an additional 18 *FTEs*. We take great exception to the this request inasmuch as the Department of the Interior/Bureau of Indian Affairs has never provided the full appropriations that were authorized for the planning and construction phases of the JDC. The Sac and Fox Nation, due to the failure of the full funding commitment by federal officials not being honored, has had to utilize funds that could have been used for other social services needs. The Sac and Fox Nation is committed to working with the federal government in an effort to help them fulfill their financial commitment. With the promise of full funding realized, the JDC will be ready, willing and able to meet the needs of Tribes who need our help in guiding their children toward a successful future while providing a culturally and spiritually sensitive environment. However, the needs of these Tribes and the children we serve will continue to be unmet as long as new facilities are continually funded and constructed without funding for operations.

In FY 2004, the Office of the Inspector General issues the report, "Neither Safe nor Secure" – An Assessment of Indian Detention Facilities, citing the existence of serious safety, security, and maintenance deficiencies at detention centers throughout Indian Country. One of the primary recommendations was the need to identify and remedy staffing shortages whereby Indian Affairs responded that "current facilities still remain understaffed by a total of 373 positions (74 positions for Indian Affairs direct service programs and 299 positions for programs operated by Tribes under P.L. 93-638 and Self-Governance compacts).¹

There is an opportunity for you as the Legislative Branch of the United States of America to work with the Sac and Fox Nation to improve the lives of Indian children that have made poor choices. These choices are usually based on the absence of guidance, culture, and discipline. The Sac and Fox Nation JDC is committed to the rehabilitation of our Native children. Full-funding the JDC will offer each juvenile the opportunity to receive continuing education through a local High School. The students are afforded everything provided by a public school, including a graduation ceremony if they successfully achieve the state requirements. The possibilities are endless but are unrealized because despite of tribal funds and various grants, the funding is inadequate to operate the facility.

Therefore, the Sac and Fox Nation is requesting that the federal government recommit to funding for the JDC *in the amount of \$4.8 million*.

The Sac and Fox Nation is proud to be a Self-Governance Tribe. Thank you.

¹ FY 2013 U.S. Department of the Interior Budget Justifications – Green Book