

OPENING STATEMENT

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for travelling here to testify at this hearing.

Today we will be hearing from witnesses on my bill, H.R. 4957, the Native American Child Protection Act.

There is an enormous need for family violence prevention and treatment resources in tribal communities.

This subcommittee has been committed to investigating and addressing the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, including the startling fact that domestic violence impacts one in three Native women.

Studies show that in 49–70% of cases, men who abuse their partners also abuse their children.

However, we have not examined elevated rates of child abuse and neglect among Native children, and how it is worsened by the near lack of resources available to Tribes to address this issue.

That changes today.

My bill will improve the prevention, investigation, treatment, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect in Indian Country by ensuring Tribes have the resources they need to take care of Native children in culturally-competent ways.

It does so by improving and reauthorizing three programs originally passed as part of the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act.

The Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act was first passed in 1990 in response to widespread reports that Native children were being physically and sexually abused in BIA-run boarding schools in the 1980s.

The purpose of the Act was to identify the scope of underreported child abuse in Indian Country, fill gaps in tribal child welfare services, improve coordination between child welfare and domestic violence programs, and to provide funds for mental health treatment in Indian Country.

Unfortunately, only \$5 million of the \$43 million annual authorization was appropriated under the Act, leaving broad sections of the Act un-implemented until its authorization expired in 1997.

My bill modernizes and reauthorizes the programs in this Act that are still sorely needed in Indian Country.

First, it reauthorizes and improves the Indian Child Abuse Treatment Program by:

- Modernizing the definition of child abuse,
- Ensuring Tribes can partner with urban Indian organizations for funds if they choose,
- Repealing maximum grant allocations, and
- Encouraging culturally competent care.

Second, it creates a National Child Resource and Family Services Center within BIA.

The National Center will be empowered to provide technical assistance and support to Tribes and urban programs in drafting intergovernmental agreements, training staff, and aiding Tribal child welfare programs.

Finally, the bill reauthorizes and improves the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention program by:

- Expanding flexibility for the use of prevention funds,
- Encouraging culturally-specific prevention programs,
- Amending program standards to be more appropriate for Tribal grantees, and
- Increasing program funding to account for inflation and need.

Part of the federal government's trust responsibility is protecting the most vulnerable members of Indigenous communities: Native children.

Right now, we are failing to protect Native children.

There isn't a single federal program providing adequate funding for child abuse and neglect treatment and prevention in Indian Country.

But, as I said earlier, **that changes today.** And this Committee is committed to ensuring that the federal government upholds its trust responsibility.

That is why I am proud to have introduced this bill with Ranking Member Cook, and why I am grateful to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Cook, thank you for your support of this legislation and I would now like to recognize you for any opening remarks.