

To the prestigious House Natural Resource Committee,

My name is Lakota Harden, of the Lakota and Hochunk Nations, enrolled in Winnebago, Nebraska, currently residing in Sitka, Alaska. I am now a great-grandmother, and a Boarding School survivor.

I first attended Marty Mission, in Marty, South Dakota at the age of 7, for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade through 3<sup>rd</sup>. I then attended St. Joseph's Indian School in 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, leaving there in 1971. I am a descendant of Boarding school attendees, my mother/aunts attended Cheyenne River Boarding Schools as well as my grandmother and Great-grandmothers attended Marty Mission. Unfortunately, they are gone now, so I'm unable to report exact dates of their attendances. I know that this has been our family's legacy as my great-great grandmother Agnes who was born in 1867. To follow where our children were taken, she became a native minister for Survival purposes, as the actions to those who did not conform to Christianity risked death. She had many stories, and the ones I remember the most was how her childhood was Free and happy. This was before the invasion of this government.

The "H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act" is long overdue. The accountability of this government is necessary for building integrity and further policies in moving forward as nations.

I've dedicated my life working with our Native children, and I have seen repeatedly how the chronic adverse childhood experience all stem from genocidal effects of the history repressive legislation created to deal with our people. The Boarding School experience seems to have an intergenerational impact that concerns the generations who were raised by those who attended, even if the people themselves did not. This experience needs to be examined thoroughly to bring about the focus what needs to happen for the further healing of our nations.

**This intergeneration impact is still a major part of the collective problems in our communities. It is necessary to remedy this line of deep life-shaping trauma. The thorough look at the truth of the boarding school process needs to be brought to light for this nation to heal. We are in a time where the whole country is doing their own healing, and truth needs to be revealed.**

As a child of 7, I was left at boarding school for the first time and the trauma affected, damaged my spirit, my soul, my physical and emotional being. Being away from my mother for the first time, I was crying uncontrollably which led to the nuns locking me in the infirmary. They didn't want my crying to affect the dozens of other little girls, so they isolated me. I am now 64 years old and I remember that night so clearly. The despair I felt that morning with the sun rising as I begged God to let me see my mother again, that I would 'be good'. I've dedicated my life to my healing and the healing of my people over the generations because of that night and the many years of abuse to follow. What I don't talk about it when we are in the infirmary, we are easy prey, as the priests would come in throughout the night in the darkness to do unthinkable things. I buried that memory for many years well into my 20's. Since these occluded memories surfaced, I began remembering more. These actions were common and widespread to all the children who went through these institutions. I've talked to hundreds of my people, only in personal confidences, and 100% of them have similar stories of sexual abuse and other assaults. These need to be healed! Investigating, and stating truths about these secrets, bringing light to them is the first step in healing.

We are in a time in our country where truth is valued, and history is being examined. The thousands of buried children need to be recognized, unearthed to be returned their families, to join them in their resting places.

This is the responsibility of the governing bodies who made the decisions to carry out these heinous acts. This government needs to be held accountable and this legislation is necessary. The poets, writers, speakers of our time, are raising their voices that this history be known. You hold the power to make this happen, and you now have the opportunity to begin the process of healing working together with us.

As a descendant of the survivors of genocide on my own homelands, we also need to be recognized as the resilient, brilliant powerful beings we are. The damage has continued and the many issues are epidemic among our communities, but we have persevered, progressed, and do have the strength and willingness to heal.

We thank you for taking this request seriously. Your own ancestors and descendants will benefit as your attempt to take these reconciliatory steps. Thank you all, members of the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States

For all that is good and sacred, I say thank you,

Lakota Harden

Tasina Ska Win

Minnecoujou (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe) Ihanktuwan (Yankton Sioux Tribe) and Hochunk, (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska)