



TESTIMONY OF MONIQUE FRAGUA
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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 6162

THE ALBUQUERQUE INDIAN SCHOOL ACT OF 2025

Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 6162, the Albuquerque Indian School Act of 2025.

My name is Monique Fragua. I am the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (IPCC) and Indian Pueblos Marketing, Inc. (IPMI). Both corporations are owned and operated by our 19 Pueblos of New Mexico and are located on the former Albuquerque Indian School (AIS) property. I am a proud member of the Pueblo of Jemez and am honored to be the first woman to lead both organizations.

The vision for our organizations located on this property includes creating unique and successful businesses, providing professional and economic advancement opportunities for our workforce, nurturing self-sustainable developments while providing financial returns to our Pueblos, and promoting our Pueblo arts, culture, and lifestyles.

History of the Albuquerque Indian School Property

The AIS was established on a 66-acre campus in 1881 by the Presbyterian Church and came under federal control shortly thereafter. It was part of the broader federal Indian boarding school system that, as documented by the Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, used assimilationist policies that caused lasting harm to Indigenous communities. The school closed in 1981, and its legacy is one that our 19 Pueblos have worked to transform from a symbol of forced assimilation into a vibrant center of cultural preservation and economic empowerment.

Since 1969, Congress has undertaken a long and deliberate process of returning the former AIS property to our 19 Pueblos. This effort has been remarkably bipartisan, spanning multiple decades



and involving members of both parties, including former Senator Pete Domenici, former Senator Jeff Bingaman, former Senator Tom Udall, Senator Martin Heinrich, Senator Ben Ray Lujan, former Representative Manuel Lujan Jr., former Representative Michelle Lujan Grisham, and now Representative Melanie Stansbury.

A Proven Legislative Record of Success

H.R. 6162 is the latest chapter in a well-established, successful legislative framework. Congress has previously transferred portions of the former AIS property into trust for our 19 Pueblos, and each transfer has resulted in measurable economic development, job creation, and cultural preservation. I want to briefly describe this history because it demonstrates that Congress's investment has yielded extraordinary results.

Public Law 95-232 (1978): The first 11 acres were conveyed and used to build the IPCC. Since our founding, we have operated successfully and self-sufficiently, celebrating our 50th Anniversary this year.

1993 Trust Acquisition: The next 44 acres of the former AIS property were placed in trust, leading to the creation of successful land development protocols with the City of Albuquerque. This portion of the property is now home to two large office buildings occupied by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and a hotel owned by our 19 Pueblos.

Public Law 110-453 (2008) – The Albuquerque Indian School Act: Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to convey an additional 8.5 acres to be held in trust. These parcels included the last remaining AIS structure built in 1931 and designed by Architect Joseph Padilla, a tribal member from the Pueblo of Isleta. The building had been slated for demolition, but IPMI saved it by financing its renovation. The building now houses the Native American Community Academy (NACA), an award-winning public charter school serving Native students in grades K–12.

Public Law 114-69 (2015) – The Albuquerque Indian School Land Transfer Act: This legislation, signed into law in October 2015, transferred 11 acres consisting of four tracts—consolidating several parcels contiguous with previous land transfers. My predecessor, Mr. Michael Canfield, testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs in support of the companion bill, S. 2465, introduced by former Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich. In his testimony, Mr. Canfield described our Pueblos' vision for the property and the successful track record of development. That legislation passed both chambers and was signed into law with bipartisan support.

H.R. 6162: Completing the Vision

H.R. 6162, introduced by Representative Stansbury with the companion bill S. 3219 introduced by Senator Heinrich and Senator Lujan, directs the transfer of three remaining tracts of land—totaling 9.89 acres—currently under the custody of the General Services Administration (GSA). These parcels were historically part of the AIS and are contiguous with property already held in trust.

Tract 1: Approximately 3.5 acres on which stands a 76,000-square-foot warehouse.



Tract 2: Approximately 5.7 acres.

Tract 3: Approximately 0.5 acres.

Consistent with prior transfers, the bill provides that the land shall be used for the educational, health, cultural, business, and economic development of our 19 Pueblos; shall remain subject to existing private and municipal encumbrances, rights-of-way, restrictions, easements of record, and utility service agreements; and expressly prohibits Class I, Class II, and Class III gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. The bill also provides for a right-of-way easement on Tract 1 to allow the GSA to retrieve or relocate Federal property from the warehouse.

Proven Economic Impact and Future Development

Today, our campus stands as powerful proof of what our 19 Pueblos can achieve when entrusted with our ancestral lands. What began with less than \$1 million in annual revenue has grown into an enterprise generating over \$60 million each year. We employ over 300 people—45% Native American—with tribal members in top management roles.

The IPCC is one of the top three most visited attractions in New Mexico, welcoming thousands of global visitors annually. It is the only place in North America to host traditional Native American dances every weekend year-round. Our campus includes a world-class museum, gallery spaces, a library and archives, an education department, and restaurant featuring award-winning Native-sourced Pueblo-inspired cuisine, and a trusted destination for authentic handcrafted Native American art.

In August 2024, we opened the Indian Pueblo Entrepreneur Complex, a social enterprise designed to support native and local entrepreneurs as they accomplish their goals for success. Over the past two years, our campus has expanded to include Indian Pueblo Kitchen at the Albuquerque International Sunport, a Tesla supercharging station, and a grocery store – La Moñtanita Co-op.

In December 2025, we were awarded a \$30,000 grant from Visit Albuquerque for the Pueblo Pathways initiative, which will offer immersive monthly experiences including Pueblo-led storytelling, artisan markets, Indigenous culinary tastings, and cultural performances.

The three tracts identified in H.R. 6162, represent a significant opportunity to further expand our economic development mission. Our leadership has long been in discussions with the GSA about acquiring this adjacent property. With this additional land, the campus can reach its full potential by providing multiple access points and providing space for growth, increasing the number and types of economic development activities available to our 19 Pueblos and the broader community.

Cultural Significance and Healing

This legislation carries profound cultural meaning beyond its economic impact. The AIS was one of the oldest and largest off-reservation boarding schools in the United States. As documented by the Department of the Interior's 2022 Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative report, New Mexico



had at least 43 federal Indian boarding schools—the third most of any state—and these institutions caused lasting trauma through policies of forced assimilation.

Returning this land to our 19 Pueblos represents an act of restorative justice. Where our children were once taken from their families and stripped of their languages, cultures, and identities, our Pueblos have built a campus that celebrates and sustains Pueblo culture, educates our Native youth in a culturally grounded environment, and generates economic opportunities rooted in Indigenous values. Each parcel returned brings our Pueblos closer to reclaiming a site of historical pain and transforming it into a beacon of cultural resilience and self-determination.

Broad Support

This legislation enjoys broad, bipartisan support. The effort to return the former AIS property to our 19 Pueblos has been championed by Republican and Democratic members alike over more than five decades. The City of Albuquerque has been a consistent partner in this process, supporting prior transfers and working collaboratively with our Pueblos on land development. The 19 Pueblos, the State of New Mexico along with business and economic development organizations have likewise supported our efforts.

Conclusion

Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and Committee Members, H.R. 6162 continues a proven process that has delivered strong results for our 19 Pueblos, the City of Albuquerque, and the State of New Mexico. Every prior transfer of the former AIS property has led to successful economic development, cultural preservation, and community investment. We have demonstrated exceptional stewardship of this land, growing a campus from a modest campus into a nationally recognized cultural and economic hub generating over \$60 million annually and employing over 300 people.

This bill does not ask for anything new or untested. It follows the exact same framework that Congress has used successfully through Public Law 95-232, Public Law 110-453, and Public Law 114-69. It includes the same protections—the gaming prohibition, the preservation of existing encumbrances, and the requirement that the land be used for the educational, health, cultural, business, and economic development of our 19 Pueblos.

We are thankful that the IPCC and IPMI on behalf of the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico have earned the trust of Congress through decades of responsible development and proven results. H.R. 6162 will allow us to continue advancing our vision for this property and expand economic, educational, and cultural opportunities.

Thank you again for inviting me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee may have.