



RAMAH NAVAJO SCHOOL BOARD, INC.

Congressional Testimony of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.
Regarding FY 2020 Appropriations for BIE, BIA and IHS
To the U.S. Congress

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
Submitted February 26, 2019

Honorable Chairwoman and Subcommittee Members, *Ya'ah't'eeh*. I am Beverly J. Coho, President of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., On behalf of the Ramah Navajo people I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide our oral testimony.

The People comprising the Ramah Band of Navajos — *Tl' ohchini Dine'e* the People of the Place of Wild Onions – have arrived in the 21st century intact, proud and independent. Having overcome a century of traumatic history that began with our ancestors perched on the precipice of extinction, followed by expropriation by foreign settlers of our ancestral lands and then decades of neglect by the institutions of federal and tribal governments, the Ramah Navajos made their mark in the last four decades of the 20th century by taking control of their own destiny – beginning with the establishment of the first Indian community school governed by an all-Indian, locally-controlled school board. The federal government recognizes the Ramah Navajo Community as a separate group, the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians, which has allowed the Community's institutions to apply directly for funding from various federal sources, such as Workforce Development Services and Title IV programs. With over 40 years of institutional history, the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. has developed a unique capacity to administer its own programs and – true to its founding vision – to educate its own people. The Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., has become a vital organization in providing education, medical, mental and a myriad of social and community services needed in western portion of New Mexico and by helping us, we help all at less cost and better services.

In order to continue to provide these vital services we ask Congress for the following:

1. The Government Shutdown has had a disruptive impact on our organization. In order to prevent future harm, we ask that Congress provide **advance appropriations** for the Indian Health Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs. There was little impact on our *school*, because most BIE accounts are forwarded funded (on a school year schedule).
2. Part of providing these services means having safe, adequate and usable facilities. Ours are not. We immediately need temporary portables to address the fact that both our kindergarten and library had to be closed because of black mold and also to address overcrowding—our middle school and high school are currently crammed into one building. In addition, dramatically and consistently increased funding under the BIA's **Education Construction Budget** is needed for **Facilities Improvement and Repair; Replacement School Construction; and Replacement Facility Construction**. The FY 2019

Indian Affairs Budget Justification says there is a \$634 million deferred maintenance backlog. With regard to school replacement, we understand that the BIA is just now finishing construction on the 2004 replacement priority list and has made some headway on the 2016 list. This progress is possible only because this Subcommittee increased Education Construction appropriations. More is needed, however. Despite the fact that our school and supporting infrastructure are in desperate need of substantial repairs, most buildings need outright replacement, and our schools drinking water system is long past the end of its useful (and safe) lifespan, we did not make it onto either replacement list. Our school is unfortunately, like many others in the BIE system that have noncompliant access, safety and health issues.

3. With the trend of multiple school shootings, we are very concerned for the safety of our students and staff. Our campus is readily accessible without a security fence. We need to have control of who enters our campus.

How We Serve Our Community

Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., being located in the western county of Cibola, has grown to not only provide services to its people, but to other non-Native people residing in neighboring counties of McKinley and Catron on the western portion of New Mexico. Our lands are “checker boarded” composed of private, state, Tribal, federal, and Individual Indian Allotments. People have been moving into the area and require educational and health services. For instance, our Emergency Medical Services covers a 100 - mile radius and has even responded to emergencies in the eastern state line of Arizona. We have worked hard in improving our EMS and we currently partnered with the University of New Mexico EMS Consortium to provide training and Emergency management oversight. This partnership has produced one of our own to become a paramedic and we are planning on having our paramedic be certified to become a trainer and have an UNM-EMS training center on-site in our community to assist five volunteer fire departments and other first responders. Our EMS is operating out of our federally qualified health center, Pine Hill Health Center (PHHC) which is the only ambulatory health center in the western portion of Cibola County. The closest IHS hospitals are in the Pueblo of Zuni, 90-mile round trip and in the town of Gallup, 120-mile round trip. In our area we have two national parks, three tribes, five to six villages and 5-6 volunteer fire departments.

Our History

These feisty, determined and independent accomplishments will come as no surprise to any serious student of the historical and political circumstances confronted by the Ramah Navajo People. Dating from the time of the return to their ancestral homelands by the survivors of Hweeldi, the Long Walk of the 1860s that had removed hundreds of Navajo families from their homes and incarcerated them in the inhospitable plains of Bosque Redondo near Ft. Sumner in eastern New Mexico, the customary lands of the Ramah Navajos – Tl’ ohchini – were never included in the lands established for the Navajo Reservation in the Treaty of 1868 between the United States and the Navajo Tribe. Navajo occupancy of the lands to the north and in the vicinity

of the current Village of Ramah was not legally recognized for many decades, and these lands were thus made available as “open range” for homesteading by non-Indian settlers. Mormon settlers began moving into the valley in 1876, and a series of land acquisitions by the settlers - legally recognized under American law – effectively pushed the Ramah Navajos onto the less fertile lands to the southeast.

Conclusion

The Ramah Navajo People have come a long way on the road to self-determination and to establishing the capacity to govern and educate its own people and provide services to three counties in New Mexico. There is still a way to go on that road, and the best way to stay the course and to continue to make progress is to maintain the current institutional relationships that the community has forged with its tribal, federal and state partners.

We look forward to your favorable consideration and plan to follow up on our testimony that we provided today. With your help, Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., will continue to help all in our area.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Beverly, J. Coho, President

Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.

To illustrate how a very modest federal investment in our critical infrastructure could make a tremendous difference in the health and well-being of our students, our Priority Projects and Cost Estimates follow. These projects are essential and reflect our immediate needs.

Project, Description and Estimated Cost

1. School Library Building

- a. Leaking roof
- b. Mold abatement

Estimated Cost of Repair - \$850,000

2. Kindergarten Building

- a. Leaking roof
- b. Mold Remediation
- c. Asbestos Abatement
- d. Window replacements
- e. Bathrooms
- f. Carpet replacement
- g. HVAC

Estimated Cost of Repair - \$300,000

3. School Gymnasium

- a. Leaking roof
- b. Mold abatement
- c. Insulation replacement
- d. Floor Damage
- e. Locker rooms renovation/replacement

Estimated Cost of Repairs - \$1,300,000

4. Campus Security

- a. Perimeter Security Fence
- b. Interior Security fence
- c. Entrance Control
- d. Security Cameras
- e. Computers
- f. Telephone

Estimated Cost - \$500,000

5. Water System Upgrade

- a. Preliminary Engineer Report
- b. Architecture and Engineer Design
- c. Construction

Estimated Cost - \$4,450,000

TOTAL PRIORITY PROJECT BUDGET - \$7,400,000