

**TESTIMONY OF IRA TAKEN ALIVE, VICE-CHAIRMAN
FOR THE STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE, ND & SD
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
CONCERNING THE FY 2020 BUDGET
FOR THE BIA, BIE AND IHS
March 7, 2019**

I am Ira Taken Alive, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. We appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony concerning the President's FY 2020 funding needs for tribal programs within the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service. We would like to express our appreciation to this Committee for its support of Indian tribes. Our testimony will focus on Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education and the Indian Health Service.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has a government to government relationship with the United States of America, reflected in our Treaties which were signed in 1851 and 1868. These Treaties underscore the ongoing promises and obligations of the United States to the Tribe, and our testimony today is submitted with those promises and obligations in mind.

The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation encompasses 2.3 million acres in North and South Dakota. The Reservation's population – approximately 8,500 Tribal members and 2,000 non-members – reside in eight districts, and in smaller communities. The Tribe's primary industries are cattle ranching and farming. The Tribe struggles to provide essential governmental services to our members. The Tribe's desire is to provide jobs and improve the economic standard of living on our Reservation.

Despite the Tribe's best efforts, our unemployment rate remains above 50%. In fact, over 40% of Indian families on our Reservation live in poverty – more than triple the average U.S. poverty rate. The disparity is worse for children, as 52% of the Reservation population under age 18 lives below poverty, compared to 16% and 19% in North and South Dakota, respectively. The federal programs established and promised by treaty to aid tribes and their members are essential. We ask the government to honor its commitments by adequately funding these federal programs enacted for our benefit, so that our members may enjoy a standard of living comparable to that enjoyed by the rest of the Nation.

Our specific requests are as follows:

Child Protective Services: Services to assist child victims are sorely lacking. The statistics demonstrate an overwhelming need. According to the Department of Justice, Indian or have the highest rate of victimization in the Country. According to the 2016 ACF Report on Child Maltreatment, Indian children account for almost 30% of the abuse cases in North Dakota and almost 45% of the cases in South Dakota. However, we are only 5.5% of the population in in North Dakota and 95 in South Dakota. Finally, according to the Anne Casey Foundation, in 2015, 27% of the children in foster care in North Dakota were Indian and in South Dakota the statistic is even more startling at 49% of the children in that State's foster care system are Indian.

The Tribe's Child Protection Service program works very hard to address the needs of our children facing this crisis. But there are only too few investigators for this program to protect our children in eight widely scattered communities across our Reservation. The CPS program is outstanding, but it is overwhelmed by the scope and magnitude of the problems it must address. Where child victims need to be placed in a different environment for their safety, there are far too few alternatives. For example, for a service population of about 8,000, there are not enough approved foster homes on the Reservation. These homes are always at capacity, so we have no choice but to place some of these children – who have faced the trauma of violence in the home – off the Reservation, generally on a temporary basis, again adding trauma and victimizing the victim. There is simply an inadequate supply of safe housing alternatives for children who must be moved for their own safety.

Moreover, Sioux County, which comprises the North Dakota side of Standing Rock Reservation, has the lowest median age of all North Dakota counties at age 26.9 years old. Corson County on the South Dakota portion is not much different. With such a young median age, our challenges to provide essential government services to this large of our population is going to at least double within the next several years.

We urge the Committee to increase funding for both the BIA social services program and for the ICWA programs. Without these resources, we will not be able to meet the needs of our most venerable population.

BIA - Public Safety and Justice. Public safety is a priority for the Tribe. We applaud the final FY 2019 enacted appropriations levels for Public Safety and Justice totaling \$411 million. As you know, funding is essential for public safety in Indian Country. We need additional funding to ensure we provide the highest level of public safety and justice for our Reservation.

The Tribe has seen firsthand that adequate law enforcement funding was key to reducing crime. A number of years ago, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was selected to participate in the High Priority Program Goals initiative, which dramatically increased law enforcement positions on our Reservation. This had a significant positive impact in reducing crime. Increased numbers of police officers allowed pro-active policing rather than reactive policing. This initiative enabled officers to be assigned within each Reservation community, which meant quicker response time to calls and more positive relationships between law enforcement officers and the communities they served. The increased law enforcement presence and patrols has deterred crime and resulted in our members feeling safer. The data confirms this. When compared to the number of violent crimes (homicide, rape, robbery, assault) that occurred between 2007 and 2009, the additional staffing reduced such crimes by approximately: 7% in 2010, 11% in 2011, and 15-19% in 2012. The initiative demonstrated the critical importance that adequate law enforcement staffing can have in our community.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Standing Rock relies on BIE funding for three Tribal grant schools – the Standing Rock Community School (K-12), Sitting Bull School (K-8), and Rock Creek School (K-8). The Standing Rock Community School is operated through a Joint Powers Agreement between the Standing Rock Tribal Grant School and the Fort Yates Public School District. The Fort Yates Public School District, like other public schools on the Reservation (Cannonball, Selfridge, McLaughlin, McIntosh, and Wakpala), depends on federal

impact aid to cover the costs of the public school's share of the school operations. The children in the schools on the Reservation are among the most at-risk students in the Nation. At seven out of eight Public and Tribal Grant Schools on our Reservation, 100% of the students are eligible for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. At the remaining school, 90% of students are eligible for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program. The high rate of our student eligibility for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program documents that the majority of our families live at or below poverty level.

A critical source of funds for the operation of our Tribal grant schools are the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) Formula funds. The funds cover the costs of the schools' instructional programs, including salaries for teachers, teacher aides, school administrative staff and other operational costs. ISEP has not seen any meaningful increase in years, and as a result, there has been a significant negative impact on the effectiveness of the schools' instructional programs. Academic programs are marginal at best and provide limited services to the students. It has become more difficult to attract and retain qualified staff. If the schools serving Indian children are to be effective and if our students are to succeed, and be college and career ready, ISEP funding must be increased.

The near flat line funding for virtually all aspects of BIE programs does not account for population growth, increased costs, or inflation. Student Transportation funding, intended to cover the costs of buses, fuel, maintenance, vehicle replacements, and drivers, has remained at the same level for years. Standing Rock, funds are further strained because we are a rural community, where bus runs for many of our students may take 1½ to 2 hours each way and can include travel on unimproved roads. These factors result in higher maintenance costs and shorter vehicle life. A substantial increase in funds for Student Transportation is long overdue.

Transportation. Proper road maintenance on the Reservation is essential for the safety and health of our community, and for promoting economic opportunities. BIA Road Maintenance is responsible for 29,700 miles of BIA owned road and 931 BIA owned bridges. Under current levels of funding, approximately 80% of the roads in the BIA systems will continue to be at poor or failing condition. These are roads used by school buses, first responders and police officers. In any other community this would be unacceptable. We urge the Subcommittee to continue to increase funding for the BIA road maintenance program.

Inter-Tribal Buffalo Council. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is one of the founding members of the Inter-Tribal Bison Cooperative. Twenty-eight years ago, 19 tribes came together to form this organization. Now we have more than 60 tribes in 19 states, who manage more than 20,000 head of buffalo. Our work has resulted in improving the traditional food available to tribal families and tribal programs, including our elderly and child programs, improved habitat, and increased economic opportunities for tribes and tribal members. The vision that we had almost thirty years ago, has proven to be a success. We would urge the Subcommittee to continue to support the Inter-tribal Buffalo Council.

Indian Health Service. We greatly appreciate the \$266 million increase Congress provided in IHS funding for FY 2020. We depend on IHS to care for our 8500 enrolled Tribal members, many of whom suffer from diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.

The Tribe requests increased funding for substance abuse response and treatment throughout Indian country. The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation is facing the same crisis with opioid and methamphetamine abuse that all of Indian country is facing. This problem is a life long condition that has to be treated as a real behavioral health illness. Tribes need additional mental health specialists and substance abuse councillors to be able to combat this issue in a holistic and productive way. This is why we support the Committee's proposed effort to develop a Special Behavioral Pilot Program similar to the Special Diabetes for Indians Program to combat behavioral/mental health issues. This is the only way we will be able to combat this life-long condition in focused way.