



LEECH LAKE BAND OF OJIBWE



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Cass Lake, Minnesota

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

**TESTIMONY OF LAURIE D. HARPER, LEECH LAKE BAND OF OJIBWE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND PRESIDENT OF TEDNA, REGARDING FY 2021 FUNDING FOR TRIBAL EDUCATION**

FEBRUARY 12, 2020

Aaniin wedaakewaad, Ogaabewisiikwe indizhinikaaz. Gaazagaskwaajimekaag indoonjibaa. Niminwendam waabamininim igaye go ji-ni-dazhindaan gidinwewininaan noongom.

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Laurie Harper. I am from the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, in present-day northern Minnesota. My whole life has been steeped in educational equity of our people. I currently serve as the Director of Education for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; I am the elected Chair of the Bug O Nay Ge Shig School Board and am also the President of the Tribal Education Departments National Assembly (“TEDNA”). Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is one of 11 Tribal Nations in Minnesota. There are 7 Ojibwe Nations and 4 Dakota Nations. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is located in the north central part of Minnesota 2.5 hours to either border east and west and 4.5 hours north of the Twin Cities Metro area. TEDNA is a national non-profit membership organization for the Education Departments/Agencies (“TEDs”) of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about funding for TEDs. First and foremost, our sincerest gratitude for appropriating funds for the past six Fiscal Years to support TEDs through the Department of the Interior’s Title 25, Section 2020 grants. This Subcommittee clearly values the crucial role of TEDs in providing, supporting and coordinating education programs and services to Native American students. As this Subcommittee noted in reports in the past, “TEDs are instrumental in helping tribes build the capacity to oversee the high quality and culturally appropriate education of tribal members.”

It is with great pride that I report that tribal governments with TEDs are making historical progress in defining educational programs and services – a role that federal education policy ignored for too long and Congress has sought to change. With the Indian Self-Determination Act in the 1970s and a host of other laws, Congress has stated a policy supporting local tribal control of many formerly federally-run programs and services for Native Americans. In only the last few years Congress added direct federal funding for TEDs to the mix of governmental and socio-economic matters that Tribes now administer directly, with greatly reduced federal bureaucracy.

Continued funding is required to maintain and expand essential and successful work of TEDs for our Native American students, particularly those served by Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) funded schools. For this, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and TEDNA respectfully requests \$10 million to support TEDs in the Department of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill for Fiscal-Year 2021.

AUTHORIZATION FOR FUNDING

Funding for TEDs through the Department of the Interior is authorized in the 25 U.S.C. § 2020.

JUSTIFICATION FOR FUNDING

The Department of the Interior Section 2020 funding authorization dates back to 1988. The original authorization was to “provide grants and technical assistance to tribes for the development and operation of tribal departments of education for the purpose of planning and coordinating all educational programs of the tribe.” Since its enactment, Congress has retained this important authorization in every major reauthorization of federal education laws. However, the authorization remained unfunded for more than 25 years. Outstandingly, due to commitment of this Subcommittee, Section 2020 grants finally received funding in Fiscal Year 2015. There are currently eleven Section 2020 TED grantees whose vital work and initiatives under these grants have only just started. They and many other TEDs need continued and increased Section 2020 funding.

The majority of K-12 Native American students nationwide attend state public schools, the BIE funded schools still serve tens of thousands of Native American students across the country, primarily in rural areas. For some Native American students, the 183 BIE-funded schools remain the only educational option because of the unavailability or unsuitability of state public schools for geographic or other reasons. In keeping with federal laws that encourage tribal self-determination, Tribes operate most BIE-funded schools through contracts or grants. A few remain directly operated by the BIE.

All BIE-funded schools are and historically have been drastically underfunded, as this Subcommittee is well aware. There has been testimony to this Sub-committee by the Government Accountability Office regarding the longstanding issues including poor and unsafe conditions of school facilities and poor quality of educational opportunities in their March 2016, testimony, *Indian Affairs: Key Actions Needed to Ensure Safety and Health at Indian School Facilities*, GAO-16-391T at 3. As the GAO stated, these factors seriously harm Native American Students and hinder their academic success. The BIE-funded schools and the students they serve are most in need of the assistance of TEDs.

This is exactly what Section 2020 grants are intended to address. A crucial area that Congress identified for Section 2020 grants is the development of Tribal Education Codes, including tribal educational policies and tribal standards applicable to curriculum, personnel, students, facilities and support programs. Given this congressional intent and mandate, I would like to speak to my own experience as a tribal education director.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Education Department houses the following programs: Early Head Start, Head Start, Johnson O'Malley Program (contract for 10 local schools, including the Tribal School, plus the Leech Lake Head Start Program), Scholarship Program, Workforce Development, Tribal Employment Rights Office, Minnesota Family Investment Program, Native Employment Works Program, Temporary Employment Program, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Program, Youth Employment, YouthBuild, Youth Activities Program and Youth Chemical Dependency Prevention Program. The Leech Lake TED in Minnesota serves students attending 10 state K-12 public schools as well as the Bug O'Nay Ge Shig School, a tribally controlled school funded through the BIE. In prioritizing capacity building and crafting our education policy, Leech Lake has actively sought the input of the community, including students, parents, and caregivers. We have collected information on our challenges and prioritized those challenges. We have sought the youth input and their families input in how they identify and define success in schools. The Leech Lake TED is fluid; we are striving to build the capacity of our current staff and at the same time identifying areas within the TED that needs to be built up. This has been a multi-pronged approach to policy and capacity building. This includes data gathering on our post-secondary students and what areas they are graduating in, working with the tribal workforce development to identify current and future workforce needs and coordinating the Minnesota Family Investment Program to ensure family financial stability so our students and families can focus on education.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's Section 2020 grant funds an essential component of building our capacity. In order to meet our student needs, we are using the Section 2020 funding to develop the Tribal Education Code and a comprehensive education plan that will be culturally specific and relevant to us, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. The activities funded by this Section 2020 grant has assisted us in strengthening our relationships with outside entities and has impacted the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's involvement in areas beyond the grant. Our approach to supporting students emotionally, culturally, physically and mentally will foster our students' successes in any educational setting.

The Section 2020 grantees are just beginning to demonstrate the positive impacts we have in Native American education. We want to continue our important work and build upon our success. Continued and increased funding will help us do that. We face many unique challenges with the BIE-funded schools; they are all historically and presently severely underfunded and quite often geographically remote. Tribal Education Departments are best positioned to coordinate efforts to make connections, share data, resources and strategies to improve educational opportunities amongst the student populations we serve in BIE funded schools and State public schools.

Section 2020 grants will best assist Native American students by developing and implementing programs, initiatives and strategies to increase graduation rates and post-secondary school readiness, and foster much needed cooperation and coordination with entities carrying out education services and programs on Indian reservations. Section 2020 grants help facilitate *local tribal control* of education through 1) supporting early education initiatives and development of culturally relevant curriculum and assessments; 2) increasing tribal participation through TEDs

providing coordination, administrative support services, technical assistance to schools and education programs, including maintaining and sharing electronic data regarding Native American students; and 3) develop and enforce tribal educational codes, including tribal educational policies and tribal standards applicable to curriculum, personnel, students, facilities, and support programs. As Congress has recognized, these are core educational governance functions that are most appropriately left to the local government closest to the students being served: the Tribes. Section 202 grants clearly help facilitate this local control.

While TEDNA recognizes this Subcommittee's long standing commitment to funding TED's, we would like to point out that we view a \$10 million authorization as the bare minimum required to fulfill the intent of funding the important work of TEDs in Native American education. Further, while Section 2020 funding goes directly to TEDs, TEDNA, working closely with BIE, continues to play an important role in providing technical assistance to TEDs. TEDNA's role is one that this Subcommittee understands and has long acknowledged. We respectfully request that it be memorialized in the report issued by this Subcommittee.

REQUEST

Continued investment in TEDs is sound federal policy. It efficiently focuses and maximizes scarce resources for a historically underserved population. It encourages and supports local control and tribal self-determination in education. This Subcommittee has an exceptional opportunity to further these goals and help generations of Native American students. TEDNA respectfully requests \$10 million for TEDs in the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2021 to continue the ground-breaking challenging and most beneficial work being done through the Section 2020 grants.