



Written Testimony of Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians Chairman
Robert Blanchard

American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearing
Before the United States House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies

February 18, 2025

Mashkiiziibii is a River and Coastal Wetlands along the Western Region of Lake Superior reserved in the Treaty of La Pointe, in 1854. We work hard to become self-sustaining and provide for the cultural, economic, and social well-being of our people. We are in the Lake Superior Region reserved territory and communities around Odanah, WI because we put our people, and our families, first. A large part of our foundation is our land and water.

We are heavily dependent on subsistence resources such as wild rice, fish, maple sugar, migratory birds, and plants used for medicine. It is our belief that taking care of our environment sustains a healthy way of life.

I am here, then, to talk to you about the two main congressional funding issue that directly affects my people's ability to care for our environment and sustain a healthy way of life:

Public Safety and Justice Funding

In comparison with members of all races, Indigenous peoples experience substance abuse and unintentional injuries often related to violence 2.5 times higher.¹ This difference argues forcefully for a focus on fully staffed and trained law enforcement in Indian Country, as one of the greatest Public Safety policy priorities.

We address law enforcement by agreements with local law enforcement agencies for contract services with a combination of available Federal Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program funds and State Law Enforcement Assistance Grant funding. Four months ago our governing body reviewed law enforcement staffing, training, call response, and community activities data with local law enforcement

¹ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/funding-ihs>; Report No. HP-2022-21 Publication Date July 22, 2022) Authors ASPE / Office of Health Policy

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agencies. Our communities in Odanah, WI averaged a 20 hour to 1 hour ratio in calls for responses versus law enforcement engagement in community activities presence.

Significantly more funding is necessary to change this ratio for our communities. We alone require \$ 432,000 a year to recruit and competitively provide wages, training, and benefits to retain law enforcement staff.

I appreciate that the Committee is already engaged in this issue.² However, you need to go further. Every Tribal Nation must receive law enforcement funding so that we can protect our people's well-being. If the Department of Interior will not allocate the money, the legislature can require them to do so.

To achieve this; I ask that you set at least the 274,152,000, the amount enacted by the House for Fiscal Year 2025.

This one focus on staffed and trained law enforcement in Indian Country we believe, as one of the greatest Public Safety priorities, is necessary to address substance abuse and unintentional injuries often related to violence rates that prevent fostering memories and family connections through gathering and fishing, intergenerational teaching and learning, and providing resourcefulness and persistence.

Department of the Interior, Bureau of IAs, Operation of Indian Education Programs; Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Programs and Great Lakes Restoration

Funding through the Department of the Interior Operation of Indian Education Programs and Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Programs and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative have proven effective to ensure implementation of our Treaty. I believe I can demonstrate my point with two examples. First, our Indian Education Program coordinates and manages our Head Start and Early Head Start, Library Services, and Home – School Coordinator Services. Today, with Indian Education Program coordination, our Head Start and Early Head Start proudly serve 66

² Public Law 82 – 280 Law Enforcement. The Committee noted its concern that there are Tribes subject to Public Law 83 – 280 that are currently providing law enforcement services without any funding from BIA and “...requests BIA provide a briefing to the Committee not later 180 days following the enactment of this Act [Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2025].” H. Rept. 118 – XX at p. 48.



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children. We know the importance of centering our heritage, language, and families in their daily work.

Together with the Indian Education Program we employ 32 qualified individuals ranging from 19 -72 years old, all of whom have completed extensive background checks to ensure that we surround our children with the best staff possible. We implement a research-based curriculum that aligns with all Head Start Performance Standards and has a strong focus on school readiness. Fourteen of our students have early education plans, as our staff are trained to notice developmental delays so they can identify learning disabilities and developmental delays years before they start kindergarten. Our students receive services such as speech, physical therapy, and occupational therapy while they are enrolled at our center, helping them literally get a head start when it comes to their education.

What infants and preschoolers observe and learn from others and the environment show how our children think, their interactions with those around them forms their self-image and sense of place. This makes two examples I want to refer to important components of our young children's school readiness.

Our Head Start and Early Head Start are an example of how language and community food systems are an opportunity to center school readiness in an early childhood setting.

One of the community food systems successful initiatives is school-age youth leadership opportunities, combining learning how to harvest maple syrup, net, and clean fish, the traditional Ojibwe game of lacrosse with mentoring our Head Start children. Community food systems and youth leadership have become a source of communal activities and a learning environment for our young Head Start children and families.

The second example is our Head Start and Early Head Start children's Ojibwe language and early literacy development. We have two Ojibwe Immersion classrooms that are fully enrolled with 16 students who speak Ojibwemowin most of the day to start



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language development with students as early as six weeks old. I included examples of our Head Start and Early Head Start language and literacy, examples we are proud of.³

Each of Ojibwe language and early literacy serve as the foundation for later reading abilities and overall academic success. Evidence indicates participation in high – quality early pre – schools improve our children’s social, language, reading, and mathematical skills. I believe I can demonstrate my point with a second example, also. The Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Programs coordinate and help ensure Reservation environmental safety. For example, we have in the last year: Tested 171 homes (or 60% of all the homes on Reservation) for radon and reduced high levels of radon exposure by installing 9 mitigation systems; organized emergency response trainings with state and federal partners to ensure community safety during disasters; and Monitored 38 miles of Lake Superior shoreline and informed the community of water quality advisories or other public health concerns through EPA BEACH Act funding.

Further, the Environmental Programs with Great Lakes Restoration Initiative are important regional non – regulatory programs, together supporting 750,000 Walleye Fingerlings and 275,000 Yellow Perch Fingerlings a year released in Lake Superior Tributaries for subsistence, commercial, and sport fishers and the restoration of fisheries habitat in coastal wetlands and tributaries, including removing about 5-10 acres per year of non-local beings (invasives) from the coastal wetlands and another 10-15 acres per year of non-local beings from various areas, and restoring manoomin (wild rice) in the coastal wetlands.

For these reasons we ask that for the: Department of the Interior Operation of Indian Education Programs: \$24,619,000 specific to Johnson O’Malley Assistance Grants; and Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Programs and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative: at least the \$368,000,000, provided in Fiscal Year 2024, including \$20,900,000 for GLRI’s Distinct Tribal Program.

Thank you, Miigwech, Chairman Robert Blanchard

³ <https://www.badriver-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Niiyaw.pdf>;
<https://www.badriver-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/lskigamizigeng.pdf>
<https://www.badriver-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Mashki-ziibiing-Indoonjibaaman.pdf>; <https://www.badriver-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Endazhiging-Manoomin.pdf>

