

**House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
February 26, 2025**

Tulalip Tribes Testimony

Committee on Appropriations American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Glen Gobin, Tulalip Tribal Council. On behalf of the Tulalip Tribes, we thank you for this opportunity to testify today on funding for Indian country.

The Tulalip Tribes is the successor in interest to the Snohomish, Snoqualmie, and Skykomish people and allied bands signatory to the Treaty of Point Elliott of 1855. Within the Treaty, our ancestors reserved the right to fish at all usual and accustomed grounds and stations and to hunt and gather upon all open and unclaimed lands. The United States holds a trust responsibility to protect the Tribes' rights and interests as reserved in the treaty. The Tulalip membership continues to exercise these rights today. We are a fishing people. Fishing has sustained us culturally and economically as it has since time immemorial.

The Tulalip community is located on a 22,000-acre Reservation bordering the Interstate 5 corridor, just 35 miles north of Seattle. The Tulalip Tribes membership consists of approximately 5,500 members with approximately 2,800 living on the reservation. Today, forty percent of the Tulalip Indian reservation is in non-Indian fee status due to the history of the General Allotment Act and over 10,000 non-Indian residents live on the reservation. The geographic location of the Tulalip Indian reservation, the non-Indian resident count, combined with the Tribal economic development created by the Tribes draws thousands of daily visitors.

Tulalip is the third largest employer in Snohomish County, because of economic and tribal government growth. Despite this growth, we still face many challenges.

Public Safety and Tribal Justice – Fentanyl Epidemic

The Tulalip Tribal Police Department is a full-service police agency providing 24/7 service to our Tribal and non-Indian Tribal community, in addition to the thousands of visitors that enter the Tulalip reservation each day. Our officers enforce Tribal Laws, State Laws, and refer some of our most serious cases to the US Attorney's Office for Federal prosecution. Tulalip has 59 commissioned law officers with Washington State Peace Officer certifications – giving our officers the authority to arrest and cite non-Indians under state law directly into state courts for prosecution. We have our own Drug Task Force, a Community Response Team, a Sex Offender Registration Unit, a Victims of Crime Services Coordinator, and a Dedicated Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force, in addition to a Fish and Wildlife division.

The Tulalip Tribes self-funds 90% of its police department budget from economic enterprise revenues. Historically, PL-638 tribal self-governance funding has only contributed approximately 5% of the Police Department's annual operating budget. While the Tulalip Tribes

has leveraged various federal grants to help support specific law enforcement and justice programs, federal government funding is a minimal portion of the Police budget.

Despite our many successes and robust nature of the Tulalip Police Department, ongoing disparities cause extreme strain on our ability to protect the people in our community.

The fentanyl epidemic is placing tremendous external pressure on our police department. Not unlike others across the nation, Tulalip has had over 70 tribal member deaths attributed to Fentanyl overdoses since 2018. Tulalip tribal leadership has declared an opioid state of emergency and created a multifaceted Tulalip fentanyl response team. This epidemic also highlights the need to expand special criminal jurisdiction to Indian tribes over non-Indians who manufacture or deliver controlled substances such as Fentanyl within reservation boundaries. The US Attorney's Office has failed to accept a majority of drug trafficking cases stemming from the reservation. The FBI has told us they have limited staffing resources for assistance on felony drug trafficking activity on the Tulalip Reservation. We are left to battle the Mexican cartels and other organized crime causing a wave of illegal narcotics without adequate support from our federal partners. We need criminal jurisdiction to prosecute members of these deadly criminal narcotic organizations, and additional funding to do so.

We also struggle with officer retention, losing officers to recruitment by state and local law enforcement agencies, diminishing our ability to maintain a cohesive and well-trained law enforcement team.

We thank you for the FY 2025 bill that provides significant increases to Tribal public safety and justice, we would like to see comparable increased in FY 2026, but these increases must be realized by Tribes in all regions in the United States. This additional public safety funding will help combat the fentanyl epidemic and influx of Mexican cartel activity on our reservations. Conversely, any reduction of public safety funding would cause direct and grave harm to our tribal governments, economies, and communities.

Rights Protection Implementation (RPI) program

In this regard, the Tulalip Tribes urges the Committee to increase funding for the Rights Protection Implementation (RPI) program. That RPI program supports the implementation of federal court actions, including *U.S. v. Washington*, of which the Tulalip Tribes and other Washington state tribes are parties in partnership with the United States. The Tribe appreciates that the Committee provided the RPI program \$50,790,000 in FY 2025, a \$1.6m increase over enacted levels.

The Tulalip Tribes' hatchery program is indispensable to exercising the treaty right to fish in the face of the continuing loss of salmon habitat by degradation and climate change. While mitigation, habitat restoration and stock recovery efforts are ongoing, we could not meaningfully exercise our treaty fishing rights without the Tribal hatcheries. Moreover, the Salmon and steelhead trout released from tribal hatcheries in the Pacific Northwest support the non-Indian commercial and sport fisheries in the Puget Sound Region. The Tulalip Tribes currently has over twenty projects that include hatchery improvements and

expansion, habitat restoration and critical monitoring and researching projects all in differing stages, and without sufficient funds to complete them. Our pending projects total just over \$52 million dollars.

For FY 2026, we request the following for hatcheries, which includes an additional request of \$2.032 million above the current funding levels totaling \$15 million broken down accordingly:

- \$7.0 million for BIA Fish Hatchery Maintenance. Funding for this program is provided to tribes nationwide based on the ranking of annual maintenance project proposals. This account has been increased over the last few years to better reflect the Tribal need and the backlog of maintenance projects requested for Tribal hatchery facilities.
- \$8.0 million for BIA Fish Hatchery Operations. Funding from this program is provided to tribal hatcheries to support the rearing and releasing of salmon and steelhead for harvest by both Indian and non-Indian fisheries in the U.S. and Canada. Hatcheries are a necessary part of fisheries management because of the lack of wild salmon production due to habitat degradation. Tribes also operate several hatcheries involved with recovering native stocks. Tribal hatcheries continue to play a vital role in supporting Tribal fisheries and are now essential for maintaining the treaty right to harvest fish, they also provide for ceremonial and subsistence fisheries which are essential to Tribal culture. The current level of federal funding for Hatchery Operations fails to meet the actual costs of operating the tribal hatcheries in the pacific northwest region.

BIA Operations

To honor the Nation's treaty and trust responsibilities, it is imperative that Tribal lands, including federal lands where Tribes exercise their treaty rights, are protected. The Department of the Interior plays a critical role in this effort under 25 CFR Part 151, often referred to as the "fee-to-trust" process, to restore lost lands taken without consent during the Indian termination era to bolster self-determination and Tribal sovereignty.

The fee-to-trust process is a cumbersome, complex and lengthy process largely carried out by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). On average, it takes several years to transfer one piece of fee land into Tribal trust status, even for unencumbered land within a Tribes reservation boundary. Delays can lead to increased costs for Tribes in providing critical infrastructure to their communities and in developing their economy. The delays can also cause financial hardship for Tribal members by causing them to pay thousands of dollars to obtain updated surveys or title reports. Recent efforts to improve the process by setting deadlines for BIA actions and clarifying and streamlining the process, should improve the process significantly, and we applaud this effort.

However, the Administration's efforts to reshape the federal workforce have led to the termination of over 100 BIA employees, including approximately 15 employees in the Pacific

Northwest Region. These decisions were made without any assessment of current staffing levels and in disregard of the unique government-to-government relationship or legal obligations to Indian Tribes and their members. We are concerned that these decisions will directly impact the ability of the federal government to process fee-to-trust applications in a timely manner and hamper other important trust services provided by the BIA.

To meet its legal obligations to Indian country, BIA full-time employee levels must be maintained, and funding levels must support this employment. Furthermore, efforts must be made to re-employ the recently terminated employees. The ability of Indian Affairs to fulfill its legal responsibilities can only be met with enough staff to deliver legally obligated services.

Contract Support Costs

Tulalip Tribes is aware of the funding pressures that the Subcommittee is operating under with the pressure on the Contract Support Costs and 105(l) leases accounts. We urge that these programs be designated as mandatory spending to provide headroom for the Committee as it balances funding priorities for programs funded by the bill.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on these critical funding measures for Indian Country.