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**Standing Rock Housing Authority
Testimony on Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations**

**House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
April 24, 2023**

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member Quigley, and Members of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 2024 priorities of the Standing Rock Housing Authority (SRHA). My name is Barbara Little Owl, also known as Wawi Umni Maka C'tomn Win or Universal Whirlwind Woman. I am a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the Executive Director of the SRHA.

As a part of the United States treaty and trust responsibilities to provide housing for Indian tribes it is critical for the Subcommittee to hear directly from the SRHA and other tribal housing authorities and we appreciate your efforts to schedule this hearing. In short, the Subcommittee must double or triple the amount of funding provided for tribal housing in order to provide the housing promised by the United States to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other tribes.

The SRHA is a Tribally Designated Housing Entity (TDHE) formed under the laws of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. The Standing Rock Indian Reservation encompasses over 1 million acres that include lands in both North and South Dakota. Our tribal population is over 16,000. The SRHA manages over 810 housing units throughout our large Reservation.

Under current funding levels, we are only able to serve about 12 percent of our population. Our Reservation has a total of eight districts and each community has not had new home construction since the 1990s. Our annual budget is around \$5 million and we have an annual unmet need of at least \$4 million. The lack of funding leads to overcrowding, homelessness, and

dangerous conditions.

FUNDING INCREASES NEEDED TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL TRIBAL HOUSING

The funding provided by the Subcommittee fulfills a critical and important Treaty and trust responsibility of the United States to Indian tribes. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and its Office of Native American Programs provide this funding to tribes and tribal housing authorities to construct, repair, and maintain housing. Ultimately, we use this funding to provide safe and secure housing on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

Safe and secure housing is the foundation for every other aspect of life. A safe and secure home is needed for our youth to succeed in school, for our members to have productive work lives, for our elders to live long lives, and for us to maintain healthy communities. When our members are forced to live under duress and uncertainty caused by homelessness, overcrowded housing, and substandard or unsafe housing, it impacts every other part of their lives. In the 2018 “Broken Promises” report from the United States Commission on Civil Rights, the Commission noted that Indian households that are overcrowded or lack adequate plumbing have grown by 21 percent, and Indian families facing severe housing costs have grown by 55 percent. The Subcommittee must fulfill its treaty and trust responsibilities and provide the funding needed to address these issues.

The reauthorization and funding for the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) is an Indian Country priority. NAHASDA aimed to streamline access to tribal housing funding. Although there have been increases in NAHASDA funding in recent years, additional funding is still needed to address housing issues resulting from years of chronic underfunding, stagnant funding, and to keep pace with current material costs.

In particular, the SRHA needs new housing construction. Although we are grateful for the increase in funding from FY 2022 to FY 2023, this funding increase has not allowed us to expand

our housing stock or the services we provide. The current budget does not allow for SRHA to clear our waitlist, provide new low-income affordable housing, or fund other needed projects. Instead, under current funding we are operating on an extremely limited capacity and can barely maintain the housing stock that we have.

The challenge to create new housing on the Reservation could be alleviated by doubling or tripling the funding provided for tribal housing authorities. This funding would allow us to build new housing to address our growing waiting list of 297 families and individuals, provide affordable low-income housing, and develop projects to provide housing suitable for professionals in the medical, financial, gaming, legal, and other fields. As we prioritize housing for low-income families, we are also looking to develop housing projects that will bring economic diversity, growth, and employment security on the Reservation.

FUNDING IS DESPERATELY NEEDED TO REPAIR HOUSING

Approximately 40 percent of our housing stock is considered substandard, and many of our homes lack basic utilities and amenities. Current homes have service lines that have been damaged by vegetation breaking lines and causing sewers to back up into the home units. Funding to repair/replace current collapsing service lines to occupied units is critically needed. In some locations on the Reservation we currently have water and sewer lines in place and ready for new home development but have not been able to complete any new construction since the 1990s due to lack of funding for home development.

Base funding is critically needed to rehabilitate housing. Funding through HUD grants is competitive and cannot be relied on from year to year. All units are old and are in desperate need of repairs. The average cost per unit for rehabilitation ranges from \$50,000 to \$90,000. We currently have a total of 810 units and all need significant repairs to meet the par levels. The

estimated total cost of these repairs range from \$5 million up to \$72 million.

Unfortunately, there are also multiple issues with methamphetamine use and production in housing units. Methamphetamine use and production can completely damage a home and remediation needs to be completed before a unit can have construction started or a family occupying the unit. The average cost per unit is \$15,000 with an average of 125 units currently needing to be remediated. The total amount that SRHA needs is approximately \$1,875,000, however, because there are no methamphetamine remediation service providers close to the Reservation, that figure does not include estimated cost for travel, lodging, or other costs.

Many of our housing units are simply not habitable. More than 70 of our existing homes cannot be used and are in complete disrepair. Under current funding levels we are forced to focus on minimal repairs that can be made to old housing units.

IMPACT OF LACK OF LAW ENFORCEMENT ON HOUSING

We ask that the Subcommittee recognize the critical connection between law enforcement and providing safe and secure housing. Our homes that are in complete disrepair are subject to vandalism and illicit activities. The lack of law enforcement to protect these uninhabitable homes creates unsafe environments and negatively impacts our communities. As mentioned above, housing units are often subject to the use and production of methamphetamine. We need adequate law enforcement funding to help protect our housing units from these illicit activities. Our tribal community and surrounding communities deserve safe and secure housing.

FUNDING FOR HOUSING ADMINISTRATION IS ALSO NEEDED

Funding to address staffing issues and structural issues with our administration building is needed. We lack space to administer the housing program and help educate tenants on good home ownership and financial practices. The current SRHA administration building was built in the

1970s and had additions to the building made throughout the years. Currently, there are several buildings that were added on to make up the housing authority administration building.

Only small amounts of funding can be used to patch these structural issues such as windows, leaks, mold, electrical, plumbing, and space. Our main focus is getting suitable housing for Standing Rock families; however, our administration building is dilapidated with more and more need for repairs to preserve services and files. A new administration building would cost an estimated \$100 million. These estimates continue to increase with inflation in building materials and labor. A projected increase for costs could be as much as 34 percent by next year. Our administration building is falling apart and we desperately need funding for administrative functions so that we can continue to provide and support housing on the Reservation.

Funding is also needed to staff our administrative services. Under our current budget we are forced to cut back spending starting in March each year to ensure our employees are paid. Despite extensive recruitment efforts to find capable and qualified applicants for jobs in all areas, SRHA currently has vacancies in a number of significant areas. With a decrease in the number of qualified contractors bidding on projects due to the rising costs of materials and a vacancy in our Force Account Management, SRHA cannot complete repairs and maintenance on our physically deteriorating units. Current staffing vacancies include: a Finance Manager, Two Force Account Managers, Four Maintenance People, One Resident Specialist, One Groundskeeper/Custodian, and Skilled Staffing: Electrical, Plumbing, and HVAC.

CONCLUSION

We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to provide double or triple current funding levels in the FY 2024 appropriations for tribal housing. The United States has a treaty and trust responsibility to provide safe and secure housing on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.