

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF
RUSSELL SOSSAMON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
COMANCHE NATION HOUSING AUTHORITY, LAWTON, OKLAHOMA
BEFORE THE
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ,COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT,
AND RELATED AGENCIES
FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET HEARING
APRIL 28, 2023**

Chairman Cole, Ranking Member Quigley , and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Russell Sossamon. For the past six (6) years I have served as the Executive Director of the Comanche Nation Housing Authority (CNHA), located in Lawton Oklahoma. Prior to that I served nineteen (19) years as Executive Director of the Housing Authority of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I am an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to share my perspective on Tribal housing.

Funding for Indian housing and related community development activities is appropriated annually, primarily through the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Native American Programs (HUD-ONAP). I appreciate your work deciding how to best allocate this funding to the HUD-ONAP's various tribal housing programs to meet the federal government's treaty and trust responsibilities to Tribal communities.

The HUD-ONAP tribal housing programs most utilized by the CNHA, in the HUD's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 proposed budget, includes the Formula Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG), the Competitive Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG), and the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) . Therefore, most of my testimony will focus on those requested funding levels. The Administration's FY 2024 budget continues to trend in the right direction for tribal housing programs. The FY24 Budget proposes \$820 million funding for the primary tribal housing funding source, the Formula IHBG. This requested level would continue the gains provided by Congress through FY 2022 & 2023 appropriations, which marked the first substantial increases to the Formula IHBG in decades. Additionally, the Administration's Budget largely maintains funding levels for the Competitive IHBG and the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG). Even though this budget would provide a greatly needed bump up across tribal housing programs, significantly more is needed to offset the predominantly stagnant funding levels of tribal housing programs for over two decades and more adequately address the unmet housing needs in Indian Country.

Formula Indian Housing Block Grant

The Formula IHBG was established by NAHASDA in 1996 and is the single largest source of Federal funding for housing development, housing-related infrastructure, and home maintenance in Indian Country. However, investment in tribal housing as compared to the entire HUD budget has decreased by half since 2001. In 2001, Formula IHBG funding (\$638 million) comprised 2.5% of the overall \$26 billion HUD budget. Now the FY 2023 Formula IHBG funding represents just 1.08% of the HUD's \$72.1 billion Total Discretionary budget.

Since funding began under NAHASDA in FY1998 at the level of \$600 million the relative value of the dollars invested in tribal programs have eroded. The FY 2022 Formula IHBG funding of \$772 million had just 72% of the buying power relative to the 600 million *in 1998*. While the relative funding value is down, Native populations, and their housing needs have continued to rise over the past 20 years as indicated by the 2020 census.

**Note, inflations calculations based on Department of Labor's CPI Inflation Calculator as of 08-31-2022.*

To adjust for inflation since NAHASDA IHBG program was enacted in FY 1998, the FY 2023 Formula (only) IHBG program funding appropriation would have to been approximately \$1.083 billion to match the purchasing power of original NAHASDA IHBG program funding appropriation. The FY 2023 Formula IHBG program funding appropriation is \$772 million, which is \$311 million less than the total amount of funding needed for the Formula (only) IHBG program funding to have kept up with inflation from 1998 through 2022.

To adjust for inflation since NAHASDA Formula IHBG program was enacted in FY 1998, the FY 2024 Formula (only) IHBG program funding requested would have to be \$1.642 billion to match the purchasing power of original NAHASDA IHBG program funding appropriation. The HUD's FY 2024 Formula (only) IHBG programs funding requested is \$820 million, which is \$296 million less than the total amount of funding needed for the Formula IHBG program funding to have kept up with inflation from 1998 through 2022 plus 8 months.

Additionally, funding needs to be improved beyond simply keeping pace with inflation, as a January 2017 HUD Housing Needs Assessment found that Indian Country continues to see levels

of overcrowded homes and substandard housing at rates well more than the national average and that 68,000 new housing units are needed in tribal communities. Current funding levels only provide for approximately 1,000 new units a year, as the bulk of funding goes to rehab and maintenance of the existing housing stock in tribal communities. Through the creation of NAHASDA in 1996, the United States recognized that improving the housing conditions in Indian Country advances the United States' fulfillment of its treaty and trust responsibilities to tribal nations. However, the continued stagnant investment in these housing programs counteracts the gains provided by NAHASDA.

Competitive Indian Housing Block Grant

The Competitive IHBG funding level of \$150 million appropriated by Congress each year for FY 2018 through FY 2023 resulted in substantial increases Indian Housing programs for the last six years. The HUD's FY 2024 requested Competitive IHBG program funding level of the is \$150 continues the gains in appropriations. While the enacted Competitive IHBG programs provided greatly needed funding increase to the overall tribal housing programs more is needed to offset the effects of stagnant funding levels for over two decades, to adequately address the unmet housing needs in Indian Country.

To adjust for inflation since NAHASDA IHBG program was enacted in FY 1998, the FY 2023 Formula IHBG program and FY 2023 Competitive IHBG program combined funding appropriations would have to been approximately \$1.083 billion to match the purchasing power of original NAHASDA IHBG program funding appropriation. The FY 2023 Formula IHBG program funding appropriation (\$772 million) and the FY 2023 Competitive IHBG program (\$150 million)

combined is \$922 million, which is \$161 million less than the total amount of combined funding needed for the FY 2023 Formula IHBG program and FY 2023 Competitive IHBG program combined funding needed to have kept up with inflation from 1998 through 2022.

To adjust for inflation since the NAHASDA IHBG program was enacted in FY 1998, the FY 2024 Formula IHBG program and FY 2024 Competitive IHBG program combined funding requested would have to be approximately \$1.642 billion to match the purchasing power of original NAHASDA IHBG program funding appropriation. The HUD's FY 2024 Formula IHBG programs funding requested (\$820 million) and FY 2024 Competitive IHBG program funding request (\$150 million) combined is \$970 million, which is \$672 million less than the total amount of funding needed for the Formula IHBG program funding to have kept up with inflation from 1998 through 2022 plus 8 months.

Indian Community Development Block Grant

The ICDBG is a competitive grant program through which tribes can conduct community-wide planning and development that incorporates housing, community facilities and economic development. These are often shovel-ready projects that address specific community needs that are not allowable expenses under IHBG. Additionally, a small portion of the fund (5%) is set aside for projects that eliminate imminent threats to public health and safety in tribal communities. In FY2022, Congress increased the level of appropriations for ICDBG to \$72 million, yet there is still tremendous unmet need, as evidenced by the number of applications for both ICDBG and the competitive IHBG program that go unfunded each year. The HUD's FY 2023 ICDBG funding appropriation is 75 million and the FY 2024 ICDBG funding level request 75 million.