



**Pokégnek Bodéwadmik**  
POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI  
TRIBAL COUNCIL

**Testimony of Dr. Alex Wesaw, Treasurer  
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians**

**Before the  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, HUD  
April 28, 2023**

Chairman Cole, Vice Chairman Quigley, Members of the Subcommittee thank you for inviting me to testify on our Tribe's experience with HUD, NAHASDA funding and technical support that we have received over the years.

The Pokagon Band is very unique in that we have reservations in two States, southwest Michigan and northern Indiana. Our 6,096 citizens are in desperate need of quality housing so the federal funds we receive are critical.

The Pokagon Band receives the bulk of its housing funds from HUD. Last year, for the first time in about 10 years, we received an increase in our annual allocation in Indian Housing Block Grant funds (IHBG). Additionally, we compete for annual grants under the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) program. Over the years, our Tribe has used ICDBG funds to pay for water & sewer lines and other infrastructure for housing development. We often leverage HUD funds with BIA road funds to build out housing infrastructure.

In the last few years HUD also awarded us CARES and ARPA funds to assist with our housing needs. We used these funds to acquire 104 apartment units and renovate a 10 room temporary lodging facility. This allowed us to put a big dent in filling our housing needs. Additional HUD funds are being spent to renovate these properties, fueling investment in the local economy.

Our Tribe operates a mix of HUD funded low income housing and non-HUD funded housing. We believe that mixed income housing promotes a more closeknit, vibrant community ultimately bringing our community together.

Like other regions in the country, Michigan and Indiana are currently facing high inflation, skyrocketing rents, and a housing shortage. Coupled with construction costs that have almost doubled the last few years and labor shortages, it is extremely difficult to meet housing demand for tribal citizens. We currently have over 150 citizen families, on our housing wait list, who are eager to move back to our tribal homelands.

NAHASDA (Native American Housing and Self Determination Act) is vital to maintaining tribal sovereignty. It is a very important distinction between tribal housing organizations and non-tribal housing organizations.

However, we do have a number of concerns we would like to share with the Subcommittee. With recent staff turnover at regional ONAP (Office of Native American Programs) offices, we have seen an influx of new HUD staff members who sometimes fail to understand that tribes are allowed “self-determination” in housing matters. This needs to be a training priority for HUD ONAP and other federal employee staff. Self-determination is a hallmark of tribal sovereignty and we are concerned with the lack of knowledge at HUD – Tribes are

being treated like public housing authorities – not sovereign nations. This needs to be addressed.

Ever changing direction from HUD and other federal entities makes it challenging to remain in compliance. Our primary goal is to help those in need of housing, not spend all our time completing federal reports for various offices. This bureaucratic nightmare needs to be streamlined.

Furthermore, given labor and supply chain difficulties the last few years, HUD Grant Timeline requirements to utilize funds has been very challenging. Procurement policies are sometimes cumbersome and delay projects. Although recently, federal ceiling limit increases for Micro and Small Purchases have helped speed up projects.

We often have to submit housing renovation and development projects out to bid more than once in order to obtain competitive bids from contractors. Contractors often cite complicated federal requirements to perform grant funded work as a reason why they choose not to bid on Pokagon Band projects. This has created a real problem for the Tribe.

Moreover, annual Funding earmarked for Native Housing needs to be increased. HUD Funding levels for Tribes has been relatively static for over a decade despite more tribes being federally recognized in that period. Each year the pie gets split between more tribes. Factor in inflation and decreased spending power and each year we actually receive less funding to meet housing needs.

Migwëth (Thank you), Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and I am available for any questions.