

To: The House Natural Resource Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States

From: David R. M. Beck, [REDACTED]

I am an historian with a specialty in 19th and 20th century American Indian political and economic history. I am a professor of Native American Studies, and have been teaching, studying, and writing about these issues since the late 1980s.

I am writing in strong support of H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. The United States must both investigate the damages caused by the boarding school policy and provide specific remedial actions to begin to undo the harms that policy has caused for generations of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.

I have taught hundreds of American Indian and Indigenous students at the college and university level over the past three plus decades, and I have spent thousands of hours in the National Archives and more than a score of other archival repositories. Through this work I have learned from both oral testimony and documents of the devastating and debilitating impacts of federal boarding schools on American Indian and Indigenous peoples and communities. These impacts were both immediate and ongoing.

I have seen the generational trauma caused by the breakdown of family structure caused by the boarding school experience. I have literally had parents cry in class because their boarding school experiences had such a negative impact on their parenting skills. I have had students break down and cry in class because their extended family systems were destroyed by the boarding school process. I have read the heart-wrenching letters and reports of lives lost and futures destroyed by the boarding schools. And I have observed the breakdown of institutions and structures that still permeate Indigenous communities because of the boarding school experience.

The destruction of Indigenous lifeways throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries was the foundation of a series of federal policies aimed at cultural genocide. As a nation we need a full accounting of the role of boarding schools in these actions. This includes federally controlled boarding schools and religious boarding schools, which operated using federal funds and funds belonging to tribal nations, but controlled by Congress. I urge the committee to begin the process of reconciliation with passage of H.R. 5444.