

**1) Identify yourself, your Tribe, and the boarding school you attended**

Elisha Big Back Northern Cheyenne Tribal Member Attended St Labre Indian School

Gloria Jean Redneck Northern Cheyenne Tribal Member Attended St Labre Indian School unsure of the year.

***a. Boarding School: what school did you or your family member attend, and what year(s) did you/they attend?***

2) State your position of support for “H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act”

I support the H.R.5444 Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act because the truth of what happen must be stated and acknowledged in order to move in the direction of healing. The boarding school era fractured the way of life for countless families for generations and erased the heinous acts from the history books.

**2) Personal story that you are comfortable sharing. This is often the most powerful part.**

I was born on the Northern Cheyenne reservation, and I lived on the reservation up until the age of eleven when I moved to Portland Oregon. While on the reservation I attended the St Labre Indian school in Ashland Montana for grade school. Every morning while preparing for school my mother would braid my hair and every morning, she would tell me a story about the boarding school she attended. My mother would say before each story that I needed to focus on my education so that the Northern Cheyenne people could never be tricked again. We needed to learn what they knew, so that we could understand the decisions they were making about the Northern Cheyenne people. My mother would tell me stories of being beaten for speaking her language, she said that the Catholic nuns would talk to them like they were dirty and unworthy. One very specific story That has stayed with me over the years is of my mother being left-handed. My mother said that being left-handed is a sign of the devil or something evil to Catholic people. My mother told me that the nuns tie her left hand to a wooden board and every time she lifted her left hand or arm, they would hit her arm with a thin stick leaving stinging welts. My mother would tell me countless stories of being physically beaten and or made to do hours of physical labor for one reason or another and if the work was not done to the satisfaction of the catholic nuns she would be hit and made to repeat the work. My mother would tell me these stories with an intensity that lead me to believe that it could happen again. I would later start to recognize the stories of the physical abuse in my mother’s behavior towards me and my siblings. My mother was a strong person, and her presence was very commanding. My mother took great pride in never having consumed alcohol or drugs and recognized that this was a crutch to Native American people to cope with the things that happen to them in either the boarding school or the military. My mothers’ parents passed while she was young due to alcoholism, so she dedicated her time and energy to not repeating that behavior. My mother became very strict and demanded respect and was not afraid to hit us to get the result she was expecting. I expressed something to my mother in my younger years that she was abusive and she told me very calmly that she did the best that she knew how and If I had a problem that I could

change it with my children when I had children. I am proud to say that I have broken that practice of hitting children and I am very clear about where my mother learned that oppressive demeaning, soul breaking behavior it was from “The Catholic boarding school”.

I want to state that I have personally visited the Carlisle Indian school in Pennsylvania because I wanted to see with my own eyes where the nightmare began, and I have witnessed the unmarked graves of the children that never went home. That family line is forever broken, and that child never went home. The overwhelming knowledge that those children were ripped away from everything they have ever known, and no one took the time to learn the child’s name.

I support the H.R.5444 Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act because the truth of what happen must be stated and acknowledged in order to move in the direction of healing.

**3) Conclusion: Restate/review your position at the end of your testimony**

I would like to Thank the committee or task force for the opportunity to speak and I would also like to Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States

*There is not a limit to the length of your statements. Your written testimony will be on record in the House of Congress.*