

Natural Resources Subcommittee for
Indigenous Peoples of the United States,
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

25 May 2022

“H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act”

TESTIMONY:

My name is James Keith Byrd, Sr., I am an enrolled member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma. I resided at Jones Academy near Hartshorne, Oklahoma in the 1960s and 1970s. I had four sisters and one brother attend Jones Academy also. I was the youngest sibling.

I am in support of H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

I attended kindergarten in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In the fall of 1963, I attended the early part of first grade at the same school. My older siblings were at Jones Academy. I do not know why this was the case.

I lived for the most part with a baby sitter in Tulsa. My mother would occasionally pick me up and I would spend time with her at her apartment. One day a significant thing happened to me at school (a bullying situation, I was the victim). I apparently told my baby-sitter about it and it was addressed by her high school son. I do not know the specifics of what actions were taken. What I do remember was waking up that same evening in a bedroom at Jones Academy. Jones Academy was approximately two and a half hours away from Tulsa. I do not remember anything about getting in a car, driving for two and a half hours, getting out of a car, walking to a bedroom, laying on a bed and going to sleep! I wonder if I was drugged. When I woke up, I remember being surrounded by fellow students. I began to cry. Eventually my older brother came and calmed me.

I never saw my baby-sitter again. I did not see my mother again for four years.

This was the most profound thing that I remember at Jones Academy. My way of life became routine. I did feel odd at times when I interacted with non-Jones Academy people but later in life, I overcame those feelings.

My real interest in the proposed legislation at hand is the healing portion. I feel that “survivors” need to be psychologically assessed for mental effects that may linger in one’s conscious. Are there long-term impact on the “survivors?” Were the impacts a result of emotional neglect? Will these impacts emotionally compound in the future? There is nothing that can be done about the past, but much can be done about the path forward.

As I conclude, I would like to reiterate that I support “H.R. 5444 the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.”

Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States.

Respectfully,

James Keith Byrd, Sr.

Talala, OK