

To the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States

Dear Committee Members:

We are writing in support of H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act.

Boarding schools inflicted pain and suffering that continue to have devastating impacts on individual survivors, their families, and their tribal nations. In order to better understand these impacts, and the ways in which those affected are working to heal this intergenerational trauma, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, the First Nations Repatriation Institute, and the University of Minnesota are currently conducting an ongoing anonymous survey of boarding school survivors and their descendants (the Child Removal Survey). The signatories of this letter comprise the research team.

The Child Removal Survey includes questions about experiences in boarding school and the effects of these experiences on the physical and mental health of survivors and their descendants, as well as intergenerational impacts on family relationships, and experiences with healing from these traumas.

To date, 865 Native American boarding school survivors and descendants of survivors have responded to the survey. These respondents have provided compelling testimony that bears witness to the destructive, intergenerational impacts that boarding schools have had on survivors, their families and their communities. Some of these impacts are evident in these statistics about the 865 boarding school survivors and descendants of survivors:

- Impacts on mental health
 - 46% have been diagnosed with a mental health condition.
 - 73% have struggled with depression, with
 - 32% experiencing severe depression and
 - 36% experiencing severe anxiety at the time of the survey (as indicated by responses to questions from the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) and the General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), respectively.)
 - 23% report having attempted suicide.
- Experiences of abuse
 - 52% of survivors indicated that they endured physical abuse like hitting, punching, kicking, or shoving at boarding school.
 - 53% experienced verbal abuse like name calling, bullying, degrading or belittling their identity.
 - When asked who inflicted these and other abuses, survivors indicated that the abuse was perpetrated by a nun or priest (32%), other staff at the school (30%), and other students (31%). (Note that respondents could indicate multiple perpetrators.)
- Impacts on parenting

- 83% of survivors and their descendants believe that their own experiences or their relatives' experiences in boarding school have influenced their parenting.
- Impacts on people's connections with their tribal communities
 - 41% of survivors indicated that they were not allowed to speak their tribal languages at boarding school, and
 - 35% indicated they were not allowed to say traditional tribal prayers or practice ceremonies while they were at boarding school.
 - When asked the extent to which they were able to return to and remain connected with their tribal community, 18% indicated "1" and 16% indicated "2" on a 5-point scale where "1" is "not at all" able to return or remain connected and "5" is "entirely" able to return or remain connected.
- The need for healing
 - 75% feel that they need to heal from what they have experienced in boarding school or their relatives' time in boarding school. Indeed,
 - 68% have sought out therapy or counseling, and
 - 82% indicated that tribal traditions or culture have been helpful in their healing.

These responses to the Child Removal Survey begin to document the tragic and long-lasting impacts of the U.S. policies of child removal and forced assimilation.

We reiterate our support for H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act as one step in a process of healing these brutal, violent legacies.

Thank you to the Natural Resources Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States for the opportunity to share this testimony.

Sincerely,

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