

**STATEMENT
OF
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS**

July 14, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Schatz, Vice Chairman Murkowski, and Members of the Committee. My name is Heidi Todacheene, and I am a member of the Navajo Nation in New Mexico and Senior Advisor in Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Indian Affairs on H.R. 1688, the *Native American Child Protection Act*.

The Department of Interior supports H.R. 1688, the bipartisan *Native American Child Protection Act*, which amends the *Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act* (Act) (25 U.S.C. §§ 3201 *et. seq.*). The proposed legislation would amend the Act, a statute that, among other provisions, required the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the Bureau) of the Department of the Interior, to establish Indian Child Resource and Family Services Centers within each area office of the Bureau in collaboration with the Department of Health and Human Services and to administer the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Program. Congress has not appropriated funding to the Bureau to carry out the Centers or the Program since the Act's enactment in 1990.

Today, there continues to be a critical need for violence prevention and treatment services for tribal communities, and the Department supports this bill to reauthorize and amend the Act to work towards the fundamental need for preventative services in Indian Country to make critical improvements such as to the Indian Child Abuse Treatment Grant Program, establishment of a new National Indian Resource Service Center through the Department, and reauthorization of the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Program to prevent tribal child abuse and neglect.

Significance of the Proposed Legislation

Congress has acknowledged that there is “no resource that is more vital to the continued existence and integrity of Indian tribes than their children.”¹ This proposed legislation will empower Tribes to provide programs and services necessary to safeguard their children and strengthen their families. The proposed legislation embodies the well-being of American Indian/

¹ 25 U.S.C. § 1901(3).

Alaska Native (AI/AN) children and families by preserving family relationships and increasing the capacity of tribes to provide for their children and families' needs.

A. Encouraging Use of Culturally Appropriate Treatment and Programs

H.R. 1688 inserts criteria for grant awards under the Act to encourage use of culturally appropriate treatment services and programs that respond to the unique cultural values, customs, and traditions of applicant Indian Tribes. Indian Affairs supports this criterion for grant awards, and notes alignment with Indian Affairs' efforts to promote multi-disciplinary work in tribal communities to prevent family violence and substance abuse.

B. Requires Establishment of a National Indian Child Resource and Family Services Center

H.R. 1688 amends the Act (section 410, *codified at* 25 U.S.C. § 3209) to require the Secretary of the Interior to establish a National Indian Child Resource and Family Services Center (the Center) within one year of enactment. It requires the Bureau to submit a report to Congress within two years after enactment of the bill. Per H.R. 1688, the Center's scope of responsibilities would include development of training and technical assistance materials on the prevention, identification, investigation, and treatment of incidents of family violence, child abuse and child neglect for distribution to Indian tribes, to Tribal organizations and urban Indian organizations.

This legislation requires the Center to develop model intergovernmental agreements between Tribes and States, and other materials that provide examples of how Federal, State, and Tribal governments can develop effective relationships and provide for maximum cooperation in the furtherance of prevention, investigation, treatment, and prosecution of incidents of family violence and child abuse and child neglect involving Indian children and families.

The bill also includes the establishment of a 12-member Advisory Board appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. These members will consist of representatives from Indian tribes, Tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations with expertise in child abuse and child neglect.

H.R. 1688 allows the Center to operate subject to the provisions of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and authorizes Congress to appropriate \$3.0 million per year for fiscal years 2022 through 2027 for the operation of the Center and associated activities.

Interior supports the establishment of the National Indian Child Resource and Family Services Center. The Center will enhance the activities the Bureau is currently implementing through efforts to promote multi-disciplinary work in tribal communities to prevent family violence and substance abuse.

C. Includes Tribal Consultation and Keeps Interior Accountable

The bill requires the Secretary of the Interior to develop caseload standards and staffing requirements in consultation with Indian tribes within one year after the bill's enactment. It also requires the Bureau to submit to Congress a report on the award of grants under Section 411 of the Act within two years of enactment of H.R. 1688. The report shall include a description of treatment and services for which grantees have used funds awarded under Section 411 of the Act.

D. Expands the Scope of the Act

H.R. 1688 expands the scope for which funds provided under the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Program (Section 411, *codified at 25 U.S.C. § 3210*), can be used to include three new provisions: (1) the development of agreements between Tribes, States, or private agencies on the coordination of child abuse and neglect prevention, investigation, and treatment services; (2) child protective services operational costs including transportation, risk and protective factors, assessments, family engagement and kinship navigator services, and relative searches, criminal background checks for prospective placements, and home studies; and (3) the development of a Tribal child protection or multidisciplinary team to assist in the prevention and investigation of child abuse and neglect.

Indian Affairs applauds the bill's inclusion of culturally appropriate actions in Section 411 of the Act. Interior is focused on multi-disciplinary work in tribal communities to prevent family violence and substance abuse.

H.R. 1688 authorizes Congress to appropriate \$60.0 million per year for fiscal years 2022 through 2027 for Interior to implement Section 411, the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Program, of the Act.

Conclusion

Chairman Schatz, Vice Chairman Murkowski, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I look forward to answering any questions that you may have.