

# Fort Belknap Indian Community



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Fort Belknap Indian Community  
(Tribal Govt.)  
Fort Belknap Indian Community  
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and  
to represent the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre Tribes  
of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

## TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE JEFFERY STIFFARM PRESIDENT OF THE FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related  
Agencies

Regarding the FY 2025 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE),  
Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets  
May 7, 2024

Thank you and the distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Nakoda and Aaniiih Tribes of Fort Belknap Indian Community. Our Tribe has over 8,000 enrolled members, and a 675,147 acre Reservation held in trust by the United States. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. Per the 2022 Census, Fort Belknap has an annual income of \$15,764, with 34.4% of our population lying below the poverty line. In the Census report, the main language of the Nakoda and Aaniiih people is English. Our Tribe requests an additional \$8 million in FY 2025 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.

**Fully Fund and Expand the BIA Tiwahe Initiative.** The Tiwahe Initiative was established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in tribal communities by providing a comprehensive and integrated approach to address the interrelated problems of poverty, violence, and substance abuse. Fort Belknap Indian Community joined the Initiative in 2016, a year after its establishment. Tiwahe includes two components: (1) a recurring funding increase for all tribes that operate Social Services and ICWA programs, and (2) additional funding for a demonstration program at 6 tribal locations (representing 61 tribes and Alaska Native villages). Tiwahe includes the BIA programs of Social Services, ICWA, Courts, Housing (HIP), Job Placement & Training, and Public Safety RRI.

Tiwahe has allowed FBIC to strengthen several interrelated programs by filling in the gaps that existed for many years. Tiwahe has strengthened and revamped the Aaniiih Nakoda Healing Wellness Center (formerly Social Services), by developing and enhancing policies and procedures for Child Welfare, Foster Care Licensing, Title VI-E, Domestic Violence and Shelter Policies, Adult Protection Services, ICWA, Child Protective Team Procedures, Batterer's Intervention Specialist Program Development, and a Foster Child/Youth Receiving Home Policy and Planning Development. Training and form development was included in this effort to aide in enabling employee confidence and job retention. Tiwahe's major impact has been the ability to fund cultural programming that has been infused with traditional and western programming and services provided by our Tiwahe funded employees.



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Tiwahe Job Placement/Training has allowed us to hire several On the Job Training (OJT) employees who have or will be placed in permanent positions. This helped reduce reliance on TANF and other public assistance. Tiwahe and RRI has surpassed its goal to reduce juvenile recidivism through the use of culturally relevant alternative sentencing. The Family Interventionist Program has been able to increase family reunification through family strengthening activities and services while promoting self-sufficiency for low-income families.

Cultural programming has proven to assist in these successes here in the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC). With increased funding we are hopeful to continue the successes with reintroducing the languages of the Nakoda and Aaniiih tribes.

FBIC's Tribal Court system is one of the most underfunded programs on the reservation. The lack of funding exacerbates drug abuse for our people and outlying areas. FBIC has a current fentanyl crisis which is increasing crimes, including but not limited to murders and rapes. With an increase in Tiwahe funding for Tribal courts, FBIC can strive to reduce these crimes happening to our people who are struggling. Additional Tiwahe dollars will assist with alternative sentencing for adults, cultural reintroduction for all, and we are hopeful that prevention efforts will be enacted.

FBIC is grateful for continued funding of the 6 Tiwahe sites, and request the same support in FY 2025. Having achieved significant benefits under Tiwahe, we were also pleased to see Congress enact additional funding for four new Tiwahe pilot tribes and twelve new Tiwahe incubators. As the Subcommittee prepares the FY 2025 budget, we urge you to provide additional funding to support these efforts. Tribes, Congress, and the Administration are united in their support for expansion of Tiwahe.

FBIC would appreciate if Tiwahe was designated as a permanently funded program and the BIA Base funds the existing Tiwahe tribes' current funding; an increase in Tiwahe funding to add more pilot tribes each year to continue benefitting Indian country; and if additional across-the-board funding for all tribes under Social Services and ICWA were provided. Tiwahe has helped transform FBIC in the way we assist our families by infusing culture and improving access to services, and we strongly support its expansion and the potential positive changes it can provide for all of Indian Country