

**TESTIMONY OF TANYA LEWIS, CHAIRWOMAN,
YAVAPAI-APACHE NATION
BEFORE THE
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES
FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Tanya Lewis, I am the Chairwoman of the Yavapai-Apache Nation. I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify. The Yavapai-Apache Nation is a federally recognized Indian Tribe pursuant to the Apache Treaty of 1852, 10 Stat. 979 and Section 16 of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, P.L. 73-383, 48 Stat. 984 *et seq.* The Nation is comprised of two distinct cultures, the *Yavepé* people and the *Dilzhé'é* people. Our Reservation, known as the “Yavapai-Apache Reservation” (Reservation), is located in central Arizona’s Verde Valley. Because of the failed Indian policies of the United States during the mid to late 1800’s and other historic disparities, our Reservation lands are non-contiguous and comprised of five different “Districts” (the Middle Verde District, the Camp Verde District, the Clarkdale District, the Rimrock District, and the Montezuma District). Today, we have approximately 3000 tribal members, who live on and off our Tribal lands, but most of our members reside within the Verde Valley of Arizona and receive services from the Nation.

The needs of my Nation are vast and range from our social services program, our wildfire program, our health care program, our natural resource programs, to our road maintenance program. We appreciate that the new Administration continues to recognize the government-to-government relationship that tribes have with the federal government and that the federal government has a responsibility to be a partner in our prosperity.

The best way to fulfill this responsibility is to uphold the statutory and treaty obligations that the United States has to all tribes. A critical component of this is to fully fund the programs that our Nations rely on to meet the needs of our people. We recognize that America is facing difficult fiscal challenges with the growing national debt, but we ask that Tribes not bear the brunt of these challenges, as we have been the foundation of America’s prosperity with our land, water and resources for generations. America must keep its promise that were made to tribes in our treaties and Congressional statutes.

This is why we appreciate all of you taking the time to listen to Tribal leaders during these hearings. We know this Committee will work to protect the interests of tribes, our people and our resources.

I. BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

A. PUBLIC SAFETY AND TRIBAL COURTS

1. Police Department

As is the case with every tribe in the country, the Yavapai-Apache Nation has a need for additional law enforcement officers. Right now, we are operating at 50% capacity and level of

need. As a result, the officers that we do have are working 50-70 hours a week. More disheartening for our officers is that they are being paid a fraction of what they could be paid in other law enforcement departments. As a result, we have a high turnover rate with our officers. We find that we are able hire, train and certify candidates, but after a short time with us, they move to other departments where they can be paid more and receive greater benefits. Thus, we need the ability to retain our officers; this include increasing the pay scale for our officers, and also allowing our officers to participate in the federal retirement system.

The most basic role of any government is to ensure that our citizens are safe. To do this, we need a strong and capable law enforcement department. We urge the Committee to increase funding for this important program

2. Detention Services

We ask that this Subcommittee provide additional funding for BIA/Tribal detention services. In 2024, the BIA told the Nation it was no longer going to fund detention services for the Nation—specifically the contracts that we have with local jails to house our offenders. This was shocking to the Nation as this notice came without warning or consultation with the Nation. After the Nation raised concern with this notice, the BIA stated that it would provide \$196,000 so that we could continue to safely house the offenders that are arrested and prosecuted by our tribal courts. This is far short of the \$300,000 needed to properly house both adult and juvenile offenders on an annual basis. The alternative is that we transport our detainees to a BIA facility in Holbrook, Arizona. This is a three-hour roundtrip and would require us to use our scarce law enforcement personnel to conduct these transports. This is simply not feasible. In order for us to have a functioning law enforcement program, we have to have a place to safely detain our offenders—and the BIA has a responsibility to fund this activity.

3. Tribal Court

The greatest need for our Tribal Courts is to improve security and infrastructure for our tribal courts. Our Tribal Courts can be the place where people are facing the most difficult times in their lives, either because they are facing criminal charges or they are involved in cases related to the fate of their children and families. It is rare that someone is in court because things in their life are going well. As a result, these cases can lead to high emotions resulting, in some cases, in threats to our judges and our court personnel. Consequently, we need additional resources to upgrade our physical space to provide additional security for our judges, court personnel and our juries.

Another area of infrastructure is the need to upgrade our data management systems and software. In particular, we need updated software so that we can communicate with our sister courts to ensure when warrants or protective orders are issued, they are shared with other jurisdictions.

B. SOCIAL SERVICES PROGRAM

A. Indian Child Welfare Programs

The Nation's Social Services Program is the heart and soul of our Nation. Our Social Services staff work with our families to keep them together. They work to ensure our members have access to appropriate counseling and other services, including job training and behavioral health services. And in the cases where children must be removed from their homes, they work to ensure that our tribal member children are placed in tribal homes where they can remain connected to our Nation and our cultural way of life. In FY 2025, Congress proposed a \$1.5 million increase to the BIA Indian Child Welfare Program. We ask that Congress provide at least this level of funding this year.

B. General Assistance

Our program provides critically needed assistance through the General Assistance Program (GA) to people transitioning to Social Security assistance. Our program works with these individuals to go through the often times cumbersome process so that our Tribal members receive the Social Security assistance they are owed. While these individuals are awaiting approval, the program through GA provides some small cash assistance. We would urge the Subcommittee to continue supporting GA.

C. **NATURAL RESOURCES, WILDFIRE AND ROADS**

A. Wildfire Programs

The Nation appreciates Congress's attention to addressing the wildfire needs across the west. The best way to address wildfires is prevention. A critical mission of our Fire Department is fuels reduction; by clearing debris and down trees from storms and floods we are able to ensure that we do not have a tinderbox on our Reservation. The Wildfire Program needs additional funding to support these efforts. In addition, we need additional funding for staffing. Specifically, we need funding to be able to hire an Engine Captain, who is qualified to operate our new Type IV Engine.

B. Natural Resources

The continued funding for BIA natural resource programs is very important. Within the BIA Natural Resources program, the Invasive Species program is critical to maintain the health of the Verde River Watershed. We would urge the Committee to continue funding this important program within the BIA. In addition, as you can imagine in Arizona, the conservation and management of our water resources is critical. The drought resiliency work that is ongoing is necessary to ensure that the lands that we have worked so hard to secure can serve as permanent homeland for generations to come.

Related to our water resources, the Nation has been involved in a decades long negotiation over our water rights in the Verde River Watershed. We have finally come to an agreement with all the stakeholders, including all the State agencies, and the local and city governments. We are now at the stage where we need Congress to enact this settlement so that we can bring certainty to the Nation and all the water users in this growing part of the State. We know funding for Indian

water settlements is an important discussion for this Subcommittee and we would urge you to treat these settlements as a mandatory obligation that derives from the United States' trust responsibility to tribes. The Subcommittee's continued support within the Congressional leadership on this issue is critical if we are to have any measure of success.

C. Roads Maintenance

Roads are the arteries of our communities, and it is important that they are safe for our tribal members and our visitors. While we have only ten miles of roads in our inventory, most of the miles are gravel or the roads are in poor condition. These are the roads that our children travel on to go to school, and it is important that we are provided with additional funding to properly repair and maintain them. In FY 2025, the Committee recommended \$42.8 million for Indian Reservation Road Maintenance account. We would urge you to provide at least this amount.

IV. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

The Yavapai-Apache Nation Medical Center provides healthcare services that include, primary medical care, behavioral health, dental, vision, and other support services. We have a patient population of approximately 1,200 patients. This includes 300 diabetic patients, many of whom are elderly. While we provide critical primary care, given the fiscal limitations of our clinic we are forced to refer out certain care, including maternal care and patients with acute pain management needs.

One area we would urge the Subcommittee to continue supporting is oral health. In FY 2025, this Subcommittee recommended \$283 million for dental health services within the Indian Health Service. We strongly recommend that the Subcommittee continue this level of funding.

We know the modernization of the Electronic Health Records, is a priority for Congress. Unfortunately, this has not trickled down to the Yavapai-Apache Nation. We are still relying on an outdated system, which impacts our ability to communicate with providers, patients, and other stakeholders like third-party billers. We urge the Subcommittee to remain vigilant on this issue and to direct the Indian Health Service to provide Tribes with greater support in this area.

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

The EPA's Tribal General Assistance Program is the foundation of our Tribal Environmental Program. It is vital that the Subcommittee maintain this funding at least at the FY 2025 level of \$72 million. As a result of this program the Nation has strong environmental codes, which we rely on to protect our air, land and water.

We also strongly support the EPA's Clean Water Drinking Water and the Safe Drinking Water Programs. The pandemic highlighted that too many tribal communities are lacking in basic water and sanitation infrastructure. This is the most basic public health infrastructure and the fact that some of Indian country has almost third world conditions is shameful. We urge the Subcommittee to maintain this funding.