



Statement of

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Chairman Barrasso, Vice Chairman Tester, and members of the Committee, it is my honor to testify before this Committee on behalf of the Department of Health and Human Services on S. 1163, S. 1419, and other related matters involving Native language preservation and maintenance. I am a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, which is located in South Dakota. I serve as the Commissioner for the Administration for Native Americans (ANA), which is part of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

ANA's mission is to support Native American communities to be self-determining, healthy, economically self-sufficient, and culturally and linguistically vibrant. We achieve our mission by providing discretionary grants, training, and technical assistance to tribes and Native American communities, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Native Pacific Islanders. ANA supports three program areas: Native American Languages, Environmental Regulatory Enhancement (ERE), and Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS). We are pleased that this Committee is considering S. 1163, the Native American Languages Reauthorization Act of 2015, reauthorizing the Native American language provisions of the Native Americans Programs Act of 1974 (NAPA), as well as the Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act.

For fiscal year (FY) 2015, Congress appropriated approximately \$46.5 million to ANA, which distributed approximately \$40.5 million to Native American communities competitively. The President's FY 2016 budget request would fund ANA at \$50 million. In addition to providing competitive grants, ANA uses its funding to provide training and technical assistance to Native American communities, as required by Section 804 of NAPA.

ANA believes that language revitalization is essential to continuing Native American culture and strengthening self-determination. Research tells us that use of Native American languages builds identity and assists communities in moving toward social cohesion and self-sufficiency. Native American values and traditions are embedded in language and there is growing evidence that that Native language and culture act as protective factors against suicide and suicidal ideation, substance abuse disorders, and other risky behaviors. Historical and contemporary conditions, including widespread and persistent poverty, have resulted in Native American peoples experiencing significant health disparities and some of the harshest living conditions in the United States. Remarkably, at the same time, Native American peoples have met such significant conditions with extraordinary abilities to survive, to overcome, and to draw from culturally and linguistically-based tools to not just survive, but to thrive. Native languages are among the most critical and meaningful of these tools. ANA encourages applicants to involve elders and other community members in determining proposed language project goals and implementing project activities because community connectedness appears key to sustaining successful Native language projects. ANA funding provides opportunities to assess, plan, develop, and implement projects to ensure the survival and vitality of Native American languages.

For over a decade, ANA awarded Native American language preservation and maintenance funds to eligible entities under the Native American Languages Act of 1992, but utilization of Native American languages continued to decline for a variety of reasons, including the English-only movement of many states in the mid-1990s to early 2000s, as well as the requirement for

highly qualified teachers under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (commonly referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)). We believe the number of Native American language teachers diminished under NCLB due to a lack of valid teacher assessments in Native American languages. Specifically, the tools used to measure teacher quality did not adequately address the unique attributes necessary for Native languages education. The lack of teacher assessments validated with Native American populations or accommodating Native languages resulted in fewer Native American language teachers being able to obtain or maintain the appropriate teaching certification. In response to this dramatic and continued decline, Congress passed the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006. The law amended NAPA to specifically target grants for language immersion and restoration programs, two methods that have proven to be highly successful in creating fluent speakers who, in turn, revitalize, preserve, and maintain Native languages.

In 2014 and again in 2015, ANA partnered with the Department of Education and the Department of Interior's Bureau of Indian Education to host a Native American Languages Summit. During the first summit we were able to include presentation from the Smithsonian Institution and in 2015 our partnership expanded to include the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the National Science Foundation, and the National Endowment for Humanities as key Summit planning partners and presenters. This expanded partnership facilitated a connection with the Association for Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, (ATALM), who provided support, including scholarships for non-federal participants to attend the Summit. Participants included federal staff, researchers, tribal language programs, ATALM members and others involved in Native American language revitalization efforts.

Building on the knowledge gained from the 2014 Native American Languages Summit, the goal of the 2015 Native American Languages Summit was to provide updates from the partners on their current efforts to provide support for Native American communities that are seeking to preserve and revitalize Native American languages. To the extent that there is a need for additional support in ensuring the livelihood of Native Languages, the Summit productively serves as a way to help institutions and agencies develop ways to better implement and fund coordinated evidence-based Native language instruction.

Over the years, ANA has funded many successful projects that have resulted in increased usage and fluency of Native American languages. For example, Dakota Wicohan is an ANA funded language program in Minnesota that trained over eight Dakota Language apprentices to speak Dakota outside of class and receive language teacher certifications. Their language levels increased by at least two levels on the Grotto/Fishman Scale. The apprentices gained relevant classroom teaching experience, and received language certifications from accredited programs. Due to the ANA funded project, the Dakota language can be heard in the local community outside the classrooms: in camps, at community activities, and even weekly radio broadcasts.

Similarly, ANA assisted the Piegan Institute in Montana to improve the Blackfeet speaking ability of children enrolled at the Cuts Wood School. The project expanded upon the school's pre-existing full day immersion program by offering more learning activities outside of the classroom. In addition, the Blackfeet Elder Committee collaborated with project staff and students on a radio project, producing and airing 12 hours of radio programming featuring

Blackfeet language lessons and archived recordings of Blackfeet speakers. As a result of this project, all 30 children enrolled at the school reached an advanced proficient level of Blackfeet.

Through ANA funding, the Native Village of Afognak in Alaska provided immersion instruction through teacher mentorship and instructional resource development. The project mentored 16 Alutiiq language teachers in a structured immersion model. As a result of the project, the number of people who are learning and teaching the language drastically increased. By the end of the project, 16 teachers received training and were better prepared to pass on the language. Two teachers were locally certified and all teachers increased at least one or two levels on an Alutiiq-adapted language scale.

Since 2010, ANA has held two separate annual competitions for language projects, the Native American Language Preservation and Maintenance Program and the Esther Martinez Initiative (EMI). ANA's total investment in Native American language projects for FY 2010 to 2015 is approximately \$78 million. Between 2006 and 2015, ANA received 998 applications for all Native American language projects. Of those, 116 applications were specifically for EMI projects, which ANA began competing in 2010.¹ Interest in the EMI program continues to grow. In 2013, we reviewed 14 applications and in 2014 and 2015 we reviewed a combined total of 54 applications across our two Native Language program areas.

In FY 2016, ANA intends to fund one or more Native Language Community Coordination Demonstration projects to build upon the successes of ANA's short-term, project-based Native Language funding. This new effort is intended as a place-based demonstration that will address gaps in community coordination across the Native language educational continuum.

The FY 2016 budget request for the Administration on Native Americans included an additional \$3 million to support the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I), an Administration-wide initiative launched in early 2015 that is focused on improving the lives of Native youth through new investments and increased engagement across the Federal Government. The budget request supports this initiative through investment in Native American language instruction, such as the Native Language Community Coordination Demonstration.

In addition, the FY 2016 budget request supports funding for Native language programs at an additional \$2.5 million for an anticipated 12 new Native language Preservation and Maintenance grants, \$1.5 million for an anticipated six Esther Martinez Native Language Immersion grants, and \$1.5 million for an anticipated 4-6 new Native Language Community Coordination demonstration projects in addition to on-going Native Language continuation grants. This funding will more than ensure that ANA meets its target of \$13 million in language awards.

The demand for funding under both the Preservation and Maintenance and Esther Martinez Immersion (EMI) Acts remains high. In addition, based on grantee feedback, we believe that the authority to fund EMI and Preservation and Maintenance projects for longer periods (up to five years, rather than the current three years) would result in increased sustainability of the gains made. Grantees would have more time to build a community of speakers and language learners, strengthen partnerships, and secure additional funding as projects move beyond the initial

¹ The Esther Martinez Initiative was enacted in 2006, but it was not its own funding category in ANA until FY2008.

planning and implementation stages. Additional feedback from ANA grantees also indicates that lowering the required number of participating students from ten to five for language nests, and from fifteen to ten for survival schools, would allow more communities to apply.

Listening sessions and tribal consultation indicate that the extra investment in Native American language programs is critical to our communities. As demonstrated by research by Cornel Pewewardy and Patricia Hammer, Harold Sorkness and Lynn Kelting-Gibson, and Janine Pease-Pretty On Top, Native language and culture fosters higher outcomes from Native youth due to lower levels of depression, increased academic achievement, and strengthened problem-solving skills. When educational institutions recognize that Native culture and language are inherent strengths, we increase the self-worth and optimism of our youth. It is by going back to traditional, ancestral, indigenous ways of knowing based in culturally and linguistically specific values and norms, that we believe Native American communities will thrive on their own terms.

With respect to ANA's other program areas, the Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS) program continues to be the grant program for which we receive the most applications. In FY 2015, ANA reviewed a total of 300 applications, 210 of which were for SEDS. Of these 210 applications, ANA was able to provide funding for 29 new awards at approximately \$7.8 million. This provided funding for 14 percent of the applications received. This total included special initiatives like the Native Asset Building Initiative, Social and Economic Development Strategies for Alaska, and the Sustainable Employment and Economic Development Strategies grants that target ANA investment towards economic empowerment, but still within the framework of community-driven projects. Finally, ANA is always looking for ways to be more responsive to the needs of Native American communities, to develop and contribute to an evidence base for culturally and linguistically responsive programming, and to develop, with our partners, culturally appropriate measurement tools and research and evaluation designs that inform policy and practice.

We are thankful for the continued support of this Committee in achieving the ANA mission. We look forward to working with Congress to reauthorize the Native American Programs Act including the Esther Martinez Native Languages Act, which continues to receive appropriations. From a program administration perspective, reauthorizing NAPA as a whole would also provide an opportunity to comprehensively update program regulations, which is necessary for improved program oversight and accountability.

ANA looks forward to the day when all "Native Communities are Thriving," and we look forward to working with you to make that happen.

I would be happy to answer any questions.