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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
“NATIVE AMERICAN HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND
SELF-DETERMINATION ACT REAUTHORIZATION”**

**JULY 19, 2007
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Good morning, Chairman Dorgan and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is David Brien and I am the Chairman of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Thank you for inviting me to testify on Indian housing needs and the re-authorization of NAHASDA.

I would like to start by thanking Chairman Dorgan for his leadership on Indian housing issues.

Our reservation in northern North Dakota is home to 14,500 members. We strongly support the re-authorization of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA). This Act has been very important in allowing the tribe considerable self-determination in providing housing for its low-income members.

Tribal members living in their homelands throughout this country suffer everyday from the most serious unmet housing needs in the nation. NAHASDA has been employed

effectively to deliver federal funds that may be leveraged with other funding and financing. However, the continuing failure to appropriate sufficient funding for NAHASDA has proved to be a real roadblock in solving the often deplorable housing conditions we face on our reservations. Since the beginning of NAHASDA ten years ago, there has been virtually no significant increase in the funding level and this must be corrected. Our Tribe and many others strongly support increased funding in appropriations for NAHASDA. The funding level should be at least \$1 billion as supported by research conducted by national organizations and the tribes themselves.

The Committee's proposal to re-authorize NAHASDA contains some important and thoughtful changes that will help make NAHASDA a more effective program. In the time available today, I would like to highlight just a few of these issues, endorsements, and recommendations:

1. Some of the new proposed provisions appear to possibly expand the Indian Housing Block Grant program beyond serving just low-income tribal members. We recommend and request that these proposals be revised to ensure that only low-income tribal members are primarily served by NAHASDA.

2. We applaud that the bill directs the Comptroller General to conduct a study of new alternative data sources for the Indian Housing Block Grant formula over the next two years. This study, done in consultation with tribes, will help correct the failures of past negotiated rulemaking and HUD-mandated allocation rules that direct the use of

race-based Census data. It is important that we find a way to allocate Indian Housing Block Grant funds based on tribal membership populations. NAHASDA is not, and should not become, a race-based program. Use of race-based, and individual self-identification data, such as the U.S. Census, conflicts with NAHASDA's statutory requirements and is not an appropriate way to allocate tribal housing funds.

3. We strongly endorse the inclusion of the new Self-Determined Activities Demonstration program that would give tribes greater flexibility to administer a portion of their Indian Housing Block Grant. In order for this program to be effective, we recommend that the stated percentage limit of grant funds be extended to 20%.

4. We hope that next year, Congress will be able to address changes to the 30% rule on tenant and homebuyer payments. Tribes need more flexibility to develop their own standards and methods for payment in order to ensure that low-income tribal members are only required to pay a fair and affordable amount for their homes.

I want to again thank the Committee for its interest in pursuing the reauthorization of NAHASDA, and with your permission, I would like to submit supplemental written testimony in the next week to outline our comprehensive recommendations on these issues.

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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