

**Testimony of William Mendoza  
Executive Director  
White House Initiative on Indian and Alaska Native Education**

**Before the  
United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs  
June 18, 2014**

Good afternoon, Chairman Tester, Vice Chairman Barrasso, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on S. 1948, legislation introduced by Senator Tester and cosponsored by many members of the committee. The Administration has not taken a formal position on the bill but welcomes the opportunity to work with you and your staff to help meet the goals of this proposal -- to improve educational outcomes for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) and Native Hawaiian populations by helping to revitalize Native languages.

S. 1948, "Native Language Immersion Student Achievement Act"

S. 1948 would amend Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to establish a grant program to support schools using Native language "immersion" education programs for preschool, primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. Such schools use Native languages as the primary language of instruction for all curriculum taught. S. 1948 would authorize \$5 million for fiscal year 2015 for such grants.

Today, only 375,000 American Indian language speakers remain in the United States. Recently we learned that the last remaining Navajo "code talker," instrumental in affecting the outcome of World War II, passed on. As Secretary Duncan stated in his commencement address last year to the College of the Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wisconsin, the loss of Native languages has alienated many American Indians from their own history, culture, and ways of knowing their heritage. Revitalizing Native languages and ensuring their continuity are the first steps in preserving and strengthening a tribal nation's culture and encouraging social unity and self-sufficiency.

In addition, research shows that being bilingual increases a child's mental flexibility and improves performance on academic assessments, and that bilingual students tend to have better creativity and problem-solving skills. Other studies support well implemented language immersion approaches.

The Department of Education (ED) is engaged in a variety of activities to promote the preservation and revitalization of Native languages, including the following:

- Native American Languages Memorandum of Agreement: We are partnering with the Departments of Health and Human Services and Interior to encourage programs and projects that include instruction in, and preservation of, native languages, as a part of the goal of the Native American Languages Memorandum of Agreement, signed in November 2012, which established the Native Language Workgroup. This Workgroup is planning a Native American Languages Summit this month that will bring together grantees of federal Native language programs across agencies to share challenges and paths to success. We expect over 300 participants to attend, representing Native languages from across the country. ED will also provide technical assistance to school districts to address the unique educational and cultural

needs of Native students, and examine current and future funding programs to identify additional support and resources.

- Title VII Formula Grants: The Office of Indian Education has made important changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title VII formula grant applications for FY 2014 in order to emphasize the statutory requirement that grant funds be used as a part of a comprehensive program for meeting the linguistic and cultural academic needs of Indian students. Title VII grants provide funding to over approximately 1,300 districts and BIE-supported schools that educate approximately 477,000 AI/AN students.
- Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions Grant: The Office of Postsecondary Education included an Invitational Priority to support activities that strengthen Native language preservation and revitalization in institutions of higher education in the Higher Education Act's Title III Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions grant competition in fiscal year 2014.
- Alaska Native Education Program: The Alaska Native Education program (ANEP) under the ESEA supports efforts to help meet the unique educational and cultural academic needs of Alaska Natives and to support the development of supplemental educational programs to benefit Alaska Natives. In the fiscal year 2014 competition, ANEP included an Invitational Priority for preservation of Native languages. The goal of this priority was to stem the decline of Alaska Native languages by providing teachers with the skills they need to incorporate Native languages into formal instruction.
- Native American and Alaska Native Children in School Program: Authorized under Title III of the ESEA, ED's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) administers a \$5 million discretionary grant program, the Native American and Alaska Native Children in School program. The program provides grants to eligible entities to support the teaching and studying of Native languages, contingent on a simultaneous increase in English language proficiency for participating students. Schools use these grant funds for teacher training and curriculum development, evaluation, and assessment to support student instruction and parent and community participation. There are currently 25 grantees under the program. The program does not prescribe any particular method for teaching Native languages, but some projects use dual language approaches.
- English Language Acquisition State Grants: The English Language Acquisition State grants, also under Title III of the ESEA, permit school districts to use the federal funds to teach Native languages to AI/AN students who are English Language Learners, as long as the outcome of the program is to increase those students' English proficiency.
- Strengthening Institutions Program: Many tribal colleges that receive funding under the Title III Strengthening Institutions program have implemented Native language programs. For example, the Chief Dull Knife College on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Southwest Montana offers Cheyenne language courses, in addition to a summer Cheyenne language immersion program for youth. And the Fort Berthold Community College in New Town, North Dakota, is working on a project that will provide linguistic training to tribal members aimed at preventing the loss of the endangered Mandan language.

In addition to the Department of Education activities, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), have a number of programs that support Native languages:

- The majority of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend public schools and the Johnson-O'Malley Assistance Grants provide funds to public schools to promote Native languages.
- In school year 2013-2014, the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) provided \$23.3 million for language development in BIE-funded schools.
- The BIE's Early Childhood Development integrates Native language, culture and history in the preschool programming.

Again, we look forward to working with the Committee on how best to meet the goals of this proposal to preserve and revitalize Native languages.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer your questions.