

“Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act” (S.2907, H.R. 5444)

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Over the course of a century, hundreds of thousands of our children were taken or coerced away from our families and Tribes and forced to attend government and church-run Indian boarding schools. These schools were tools of assimilation and cultural genocide, resulting in the loss of language and culture and the permanent separation of children from their families. Survivors of Indian boarding schools have described physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse and neglect, while many other children died while in the custody of these schools, unable to share their stories.

To date, there has never been an accounting of:

- (1) the number of children forced to attend these schools;
- (2) the number of children who were abused, died, or went missing while at these schools; and
- (3) the long-term impacts on the children and the families of children forced to attend Indian boarding schools.

Developing a complete picture of the ongoing impact Indian boarding schools have had on generations of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people, is critical to providing a path toward healing for individuals, families, and Tribal communities that have endured the devastating consequences of Indian boarding school policies.



“It’s taken a long time to be able to share our stories and we’ve reached a point where the dam of awareness is bursting. The time for healing is now.”

– James LaBelle Sr. (Inupiaq), Boarding School Survivor

WHY A TRUTH AND HEALING COMMISSION ON INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IS NEEDED

A Federal Commission is needed to locate and analyze the records from the 367+ known Indian boarding schools that operated in the U.S. These records are scattered across federal, state, hospital and church archives, private collections, and other unknown repositories, and may take years to fully document. In addition to the search for records, a Commission would also bring together boarding school survivors with a broad cross-section of tribal representatives and experts in education, health, and children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of Indian child removal.

As we have seen in Canada, the truth will eventually emerge about what is buried on Indian boarding school grounds. We have a limited amount of time to hear directly from survivors and record their stories. A Congressional Commission would help ensure that accounts of Indian boarding schools—told by survivors, families, and presently undisclosed records—are preserved, that our children who were forced to attend these schools are not forgotten, and that this destructive era of U.S. Indian policy is acknowledged so that future generations may understand this dark history and strive to do better.

KEY PROVISIONS OF S. 2907 AND H.R. 5444

A Full Inquiry into the Assimilative Policies of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools

- **Examines the location of children:** The investigation would locate and document all children still buried at or near boarding school facilities.
- **Documents ongoing impacts from boarding schools:** The Commission would compile evidence of the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. It would also examine how assimilative policies attempted to destroy Native languages and cultures.
- **Locates church and government records:** The Commission would locate and analyze all records on Indian boarding schools. The targeted records include those related to attendance, infirmary, deaths, land, and other correspondences. The Commission would have the power to issue subpoenas to produce all records.

Collection of Testimony from Survivors, Tribes, and Subject Matter Experts:

- **Culturally-appropriate public hearings:** Provides a public forum for survivors, victims, families, communities, Native organizations, and tribal leaders to provide testimony on the impacts of Indian boarding schools.

- **Institutional knowledge gathering:** Testimony would be taken from those who have documents and institutional knowledge relating to Indian Boarding School Policies, including but not limited to testimony from churches, the federal government, state and local governments, individuals, and organizations.

Creation and Dissemination of Commission Findings and Recommendations:

- **Shares findings publicly:** Requires a final report on findings and recommendations to be shared with the public and the U.S. government within 5 years.
- **Provides recommendations:** Requires a list of recommendations for legislation and administrative actions to address the impacts of Federal Indian Boarding School Policies, expanding upon pre-established goals such as: investing in restoration of culture and language, and establishing trauma-informed resources.

Investigates Beyond the Department of the Interior Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative:

Compiles all previous research and brings together partners for a comprehensive review of Federal Indian Boarding School Policies and their impacts, expanding upon the work of the DOI Initiative in order to know the magnitude of loss of human life.

Learn more at: boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission