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BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
HEARING ON
NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss Native American Youth Activities and Initiatives within the office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Each day we read the many reports that catalog issues facing Indian youth, Indian families and Indian communities. On-reservation poverty and unemployment is the highest in the nation. One in 25 Indians age 18 and older is under the jurisdiction of a criminal justice system. The reported incidence of child maltreatment in Indian communities has risen 18 percent, while the rate fell nationwide. The arrest rate among American Indians for alcohol-related offenses is double that of all races.

Despite the odds, tribal leaders, Indian students, teachers, and community volunteers, are working to change these statistics. The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs is encouraging tribes to duplicate successful tribal initiatives like the Winnebago of Nebraska program that puts troubled youth to work with a bison herd, as well as community-based substance abuse prevention, Gang Resistance Education and Training, mentoring and restitution programs. He is also working with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to launch programs on 30 reservations.

The Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs, the Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans and the Director of Indian Health Services have joined together to sponsor a national Indian youth conference. Entitled "Youth First: The Future of Indian America -- Planting the Seeds of Culture & Knowledge" the conference will be held June 2-4, in Denver, Colorado. Not only will the conference provide Indian youth with leadership skills, but it addresses health, wellness, education, and identity issues facing today's Indian youth. The conference also offers adult volunteers an opportunity to learn more about the many national resources available to assist communities in developing initiatives for youth. The goal of the Assistant Secretary is to create a forum in which tribal representatives can build local partnerships with national youth organizations such as UNITY, WINGS of America, Visible Horizons, Indian Youth of America, the Native American Sports Council, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

This is a collaborative effort of Federal agencies, tribal leaders, and national Indian organizations with a single vision — to expand the resources available to local communities so that the people who know the needs of their communities have the tools to develop opportunities for their young people. The end result of this conference will be a network for national youth organizations which focuses on the development of community-based capacity and programs. It will identify national youth organizations

working in Indian country, the activities and services they bring to communities, and how they compliment one another. Most importantly, it will provide national youth organizations a forum in which to help youth and adult community leaders develop a national strategy to address Indian youth concerns and issues.

In March, the Assistant Secretary launched the "Youth Alcohol Traffic Safety Plan", a cooperative program between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Navajo Nation. The goal of the program is to eliminate the leading cause of injury and death for the age group of one through twenty-four in Indian Country -- alcohol-related motor vehicle accidents -- by redirecting unproductive behavior and reducing the incidence of impaired driving.

The plan is an aggressive approach to alcohol, drugs, and impaired driving that includes mandatory school curricula, DWI checkpoints across the Navajo reservation and billboards with the program's slogan, "To'dithit Dooda," which translates as "Liquor No." Navajo youth are encouraged to share the plan's message "Don't drive impaired" with their peers, families, friends, and members of their communities. This year-long program aims to reduce alcohol-related crashes for the youth of the Navajo Nation, promote alcohol and substance abstinence in their communities to reduce impaired driving, decrease negative behavior of the youth that increase impaired crashes, and improve community cohesiveness and attitudes of safety for their members.

The Bureau is working to establish a multi-disciplinary, government-wide initiative to address crime, substance abuse, health and education in Indian country. This initiative builds on the community-based planning used by the Office of Law Enforcement Services to design juvenile detention programs. In collaboration with Federal agencies, the community evaluates the problem, develops appropriate resources, and designs programs to effect positive change. Rather than separate, unrelated Federal initiatives, community-based planning encourages tribal-Federal partnerships.

Working with the Bureau and the Departments of Justice, Health and Human Services and Education, tribes will begin community-based planning to ensure that juvenile offenders receive rehabilitative services while in detention and following release. This is only a catalyst. Ultimately, only communities can design, implement, and sustain programs to assist youth during and after confinement. This initiative will provide education, mental health, and counseling services that are currently not available at all youth detention facilities, including educational, mental health and medical evaluations and assessments, counseling and education, followed by aftercare and continued counseling after release.

The Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP) has developed intramural and scholastic sports programs that offer all students an opportunity to participate and develop leadership skills. The FACE Program provides parenting skills to young parents with an emphasis on adult literacy. The Mountain High Program teaches youth self-confidence and reinforces self esteem. It includes a ropes course, outdoor group and classroom training, and individual study.

Each Bureau-funded school, a total of 185, provide alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs as part of their curriculum. These schools also participate in a Youth Risk Behavior survey, sponsored by the Center for Disease Control, that provides a detailed report on their students' involvement with alcohol and drugs. This survey provides critical information that is useful in developing effective prevention programs.

In 1998, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Office of Law Enforcement Services (OLES) convened a Native American Law Enforcement Round Table Conference regarding Youth Crime and Gangs in Indian country. Tribal and BIA law enforcement officers shared anecdotal and statistical information regarding youth crime. As a result of this round table discussion, 132 tribes reported the existence of 375 gangs with 4,652 gang members in Indian country. The number of gangs and gang members is increasing at an alarming rate.

To address this concern, the OLES has undertaken a number of measures to include forming a partnership with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms to provide Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) certification for BIA and Tribal police officers. Certified G.R.E.A.T. officers enter school classroom settings, target middle school grades, present eight one-hour classroom sessions, and teach students to act in their own best interest when faced with negative peer pressure. G.R.E.A.T. provides youth the necessary skills and information to say no to gangs.

The dramatic increase in Indian country crime has prompted the BIA OLES to recognize that traditional policing philosophy must change. Contemporary policing or community policing requires police integration into the community, working jointly with the community to solve and prevent crime. BIA OLES will partner with Tribal government, and the communities to combat crime and the fear of crime and affirmatively address quality of life issues.

The Director, OLES has mandated the BIA Chiefs of Police to develop Community Oriented Policing (COP) initiatives with input from Tribal government officials, community leaders, criminal justice workers, social services, health officials, educators, clergy, tribal elders, mental health workers, business owners, and concerned citizens to identify community crime problems. In a recent police managers training session that included all of the newly appointed Chiefs of Police and OLES law enforcement managers, community policing strategies were formulated by the participants. The strategies will be implemented within the next 60 days. Once the community policing programs have been implemented, continual evaluation, including the solicitation of community feed back, will be used to monitor program effectiveness. Each BIA OLES program will participate in the initiative. OLES programs will encourage and emphasize "Neighborhood Watch" programs and, where practical, foot and/or bicycle patrols; Boys and Girls Clubs will be established; and the citizen ride-along and police cadet programs will be established.

Pro-active law enforcement initiatives are being instituted nationwide to combat the importation of illicit narcotics into Indian country and the devastating effects of alcohol related crime. To this end, narcotics investigators have been assigned to each of the five OLES District Offices. The investigators, working with local BIA and Tribal police, have been directed to establish an assessment

of the drug problems plaguing Indian country and devise specific pro-active strategies to address them. Further, OLES has established a partnership with the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration to implement a nationwide Drunk Driving Prevention Training Program for Tribal and BIA police officers. The primary goal is to provide education regarding the effects of drunk driving, focusing on prevention and intervention. Officers will be specifically trained to recognize violators and to take appropriate law enforcement action. The success of this new initiative to prevent and intervene with drunk driving problems depends, to a large extent, on tribal leadership and community support.

This concludes my prepared statement on Native American Youth Activities and Initiatives within the office of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.