

The Committee meets this morning to consider a bill to amend the Native American Languages Act to provide for the establishment of Native American language survival schools.

As part of the United States' forced assimilation policies towards Native Americans, a system of off-reservation boarding schools was initiated in the 1880s.

Native American children were forcibly taken from their families, transported hundreds of miles to schools where their hair was cut notwithstanding the religious importance of hair length in most native cultures, their clothes replaced with military-style uniforms, and they were forbidden to speak their native languages or practice their religion. Although this effort to eradicate Indian culture was not successful, it did separate several generations of Native Americans from their native languages.

The Native American Languages Act of 1990 officially repudiated the policies of the past and declared that "it is the policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages."

The Native American Languages Act of 1992 amended the Native American Programs Act of 1974 to establish a grant program under the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Native Americans to support Native American language projects.

S. 2688 would bring the nation one step closer to assuring the preservation and revitalization of Native American languages by supporting the development of Native American language survival schools. The committee looks forward to receiving the testimony of all of the witnesses today.