

Opening Remarks for Congressman Jared Polis
Committee on Education and the Workforce
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education
“Examining the Government’s Management of Native American Schools”
February 14, 2018

Director Dearman, thank you for testifying before the Committee this morning. I appreciate your professional experience at all levels of the Bureau of Indian Education, from teacher and administrator, to line officer, to your current position as Director of BIE. I also appreciate your advocacy on behalf of American Indian and Alaska Native Students.

It is well documented that American Indian and Alaska Native students have had some of the worst educational outcomes in the country. The reasons that get the most attention are the extremely poor conditions and severe underfunding of schools, but they do not encompass the whole picture. The outcomes for Native students are also impacted by the broader impacts of poverty – a lack of early learning opportunities, healthcare, nutrition programs, and employment opportunities to name a few.

As a result, improving educational outcomes for Native students requires a comprehensive, systematic, and collaborative approach from all levels of government. To fix the more than 90 BIE schools in poor condition, coordination between the BIE and Bureau of Indian Affairs is necessary. To ensure Native students aren’t facing unfair suspension and expulsion practices, engagement between schools and community leaders is imperative. Native infants and toddlers should also receive robust early childhood development services, cooperation between BIE and Health and Human Services is a must.

Only when federal efforts go beyond educational services will the welfare of Native youth be addressed and the promise of the federal government to meet its statutory and treaty obligations be fulfilled.

Right now, however, BIE spending on elementary and secondary education fell by five percent since 2007 and school improvement funding dropped by 76 percent since 2004. During that same time, Department of Defense K-12 schools, which serve roughly the same number of students, received an additional \$5 billion to renovate schools. That is a violation of equity. Both Native children and military children deserve the opportunity to a quality education.

Native students in BIE schools have one of the lowest high school graduation rates of any subgroup of students, with only 53 percent graduating in four years. Even fewer graduate college and career ready in math and English.

Despite that, the Trump Administration in its recent budget proposal recommended cutting BIE funding by \$143 million, or 16 percent. The request also cuts BIA funding for education construction by \$59.5 million, a 44 percent cut.

The Federal government must do better in serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth and engage Native communities and families in their efforts. I look forward to hearing from Director

Dearman about the efforts BIE is taking to improve their management of funds and schools, the amount of additional resources they need, and initiatives they are taking to increase tribal autonomy and improve student outcomes.

Thank you and I yield back.