

## COMMITTEE REPORT

### Indian Child Welfare and Social Services

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians  
2014 Winter Convention  
Silver Reef Hotel Spa Resort  
Ferndale, WA

### DISCUSSION

#### Dear Tribal Leader Letter

NICWA has recently published a letter to help inform tribal leaders about the effects of *Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl* (“The Baby Veronica Case”) on child welfare, private adoptions and native families. (please find the letter attached).

#### Legislative Update

**Native Children’s Commission legislation introduced to assess Native children’s well-being and find new ways to support them.**

- North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp introduced a bill to establish a Commission on Native children.
- This commission would conduct an intensive study into issues facing Native children—such as high rates of poverty, unemployment, child maltreatment, domestic violence, crime, substance abuse, and few economic opportunities
- It will also make recommendations on how Native children are accounted for in current programming and how they will be provided opportunities for success.
- It will be important to make sure that the commission is chosen via a process that ensures individuals with expertise and firsthand knowledge are prioritized.

**Farm Bill cuts SNAP (foodstamps) funding but includes new opportunities for tribal SNAP programming**

- In February, a farm bill which included devastating cuts to the Supplementary Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, previously known as food stamps) was passed.
- The bill included a cut of \$8 billion over 10 years to SNAP. A cut agreed upon in conference between representatives and senators. Eight billion is
- This is all in the wake of \$5 billion being cut this current fiscal year via the sequester last November
- The bill also includes a feasibility study to assess the ability of tribes, who already run their own Women, Infants, and Children food distribution programs and Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations, to run their own SNAP programming.

**Child advocacy organizations begin talks about child welfare finance reform that would provide more funding to support families and keep them families**

National child advocacy groups have been hosting meetings to discuss ideas on how to reform the federal finance system that funds child welfare services for states and tribes. There are several proposals that have been developed, and each contains various ideas on how to change the focus and incentives that federal child welfare programs, such as Title IV-E Foster Care, require. There are three different proposals for foster care finance reform that are currently being discussed. One designed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one designed by Casey Family Programs, and one designed by the Child Welfare and Children’s Mental Health coalition—a group of national and regional child advocacy partners that includes Child Welfare League of America and Children’s Defense Fund. NICWA has been actively engaged in discussions with each of these three entities to ensure they engage tribal governments and consider how to best address the unique issues of AI/AN children.

### **Budget Update**

#### **Budget bill decreases tribal child welfare funding and increases children's mental health funding**

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (P.L. 113-76) was signed into law by President Obama on January 17, 2014, provides directives for all 12 appropriations bills, including the Interior-Environment bill, which provides funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service, and the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies bill, which provides funding for tribal child welfare and children's mental health programs.

The omnibus reverses some of the most but not all of the damaging cuts created by the sequester. Most notably this bill does the following:

- Cuts \$15 million from the Title IV-B subpart 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families Restores \$6 million to Title IV-B subpart 1 Child Welfare Services program
- Increases by \$6 million funding for the Systems of Care grant program that funds both tribes and state children's mental health services project grants
- Provides \$5 million to create "Tribal Behavioral Health Grants" for "effective and promising strategies that address the problems of substance abuse and suicide, and promote mental health among AI/AN young people"
- Increases the funding for the AI/AN suicide prevention initiative from \$2.78 to \$2.9 million

### **Department of Justice Request**

#### **NICWA and National Indian organizations ask DOJ to investigate ICWA non-compliance**

On February 3, NICWA along with partner organizations National Congress of American Indians, Association on American Indian Affairs, and Native American Rights Fund sent a formal letter to the Department of Justice (DOJ) requesting that the Civil Rights Division commence a prompt investigation into the unlawful treatment of AI/AN children in the private adoption and public child welfare system throughout the United States. NICWA Executive Director Terry Cross hand delivered a copy of this letter

DOJ Acting Assistant Attorney General Civil Rights Division Jocelyn Samuels at a listening session hosted at the Portland DOJ office. When delivering the letter, Cross shared with Ms. Samuels some of the many stories of ICWA non-compliance that NICWA hears from tribal leaders and tribal members each year. (Please find a copy of the letter attached).

### **Speech Therapist**

- Discussed the bias treatment that Native children face when working with non-Native speech therapists
- Discussed the small number of Native speech therapists
- Discussed the National Speech therapists Associations lack of formal support for Native speech therapists and culturally competent speech therapy practices
- Discussed innovative programs in designed to support and train Native Speech Therapists at University of Kansas
- Determined it was necessary to also share this information with the education subcommittee
- Took a sense of the group- who supported further assessing this issue and putting forth a resolution at the next ATNI meeting.

### **Discussed Bluestone Report**

**ICW and Child Welfare Committee is happy with the committee structure and ATNI. It attributes its success to:**

- Consistent Chair (Gary Peterson)
- Staff support from National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)
  - Supports tribal leader decision making
  - Carry forward ATNI decisions to NCAI and federal policy makers
  - Provides expertise and support for tribal leader questions

#### **Suggestions to help improve ATNI functioning**

- ATNI internships from students this will provide individuals to help support the organizations and help build student capacity

- Bring youth to ATNI meetings- the host tribe should invite local students, partner and waive the registration fee. This will foster future leaders
- Share more with other intertribal organizations. Hear more about what they are doing that is working well and share more about what ATNI tribes are doing that is work.
- Publish committee reports online after each meeting to increase institutional knowledge and keep tribal leaders informed.

**Discussed 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ATNI**

Discussed whether the ICWA and Social Service Committee (or the Chair) facilitate a river of culture to celebrate the accomplishments of ATNI over the years?

**Day 2**

ICW and Social Service Committee joined the Northwest Tribal TANF Workshop to discuss the intersection of tribal child welfare and TANF (see powerpoint attached)

**ADOPTED AND RECOMMENDED TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

None.

**COMMITTEE - TABLED**

None.

Minutes/Report submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Committee Chair