

February 3, 2015

Senator
Office
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), a bipartisan organization advocating for legislative change in Congress to ensure children and families are a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, I would like to express our support for The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act (S. 246). We thank you for considering this important piece of legislation that will begin to address the problems facing Native children.

The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act, introduced by Senators Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), will establish an 11-person commission to reexamine the federal government's commitment to Native children and propose new ideas to improve outcomes for what is currently America's most at-risk population. Statistics show disproportionately high rates of poverty, victimization, suicide, substance abuse, and child mortality for Native children. In the 2011-2012 school year, American Indian and Alaska Native students had the lowest graduation rate among racial and ethnic groups, and only 13% of Native children had obtained undergraduate degrees. These factors all contribute to the overrepresentation of Native children in foster care, as this population is over 2 times more likely than their peers to come in contact with the child welfare system.

The current reality for Native children is tragic and unacceptable. Fortunately, the bi-partisan appointed commission that would be established by Senator Heitkamp and Senator Murkowski's bill could take the important first steps towards improving outcomes for this at-risk population. The commission would issue recommendations to improve the allocation and utilization of resources targeted to Native children. Under the leadership of the commission, public-private partnerships as well as federal, tribal, state, and local agencies can begin to improve coordination and implement best practices to serve and support Native children. There is no magic fix for the problems facing Native children across the United States, but organizing a commission of experts to provide innovative and practical solutions is a great start towards tearing down barriers to opportunity for Native children and their communities.

Thank you for considering The Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act, which will help provide solutions to the disparities facing Native children and ensure they have every opportunity to lead healthy, successful lives.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President