

Introduce and Support the Creation of a Truth and Healing Commission on the Indian Boarding School Era

From the mid-1800s through the 1960s, Christian churches collaborated with the federal government to force Native American children to attend Indian boarding schools. The boarding school system was pervasive— more than 60,000 Native children attended over 500 different schools. The conditions at these institutions were horrific. Yet, the federal government has never conducted a full exploration of the harms and impacts of this federal policy.

The bipartisan Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act would change that. It would establish the first formal commission in U.S. history to investigate and document the policies and practices of hundreds of federally sponsored, faith-run institutions. The commission's investigation would include the forced removal of Native children from their families, the attempted termination of Indigenous cultures and languages, and the legacy of boarding schools in Native communities.

Research has continued to show that survivors of boarding schools, and their descendants, are far more likely to experience depression and PTSD, have a substance abuse disorder, and live in poverty. Native communities remain some of the poorest in the United States. Congress must demand a full accounting of how federal funds were used to undermine tribal sovereignty and prevent Native families from raising their children without interference.

Many denominations have stepped forward to acknowledge their complicity in the historic trauma of the boarding school era as a first step towards reconciliation. They are committed to fully participating with the commission. The strength of the commission will rest on living survivors being heard, as well as families and communities learning the truth about their loved ones — some of whom never made it home from these institutions. Unlike any previous investigation into the boarding school era, the commission brings all relevant stakeholders together in the search for healing: faith communities, Native communities, and the U.S. government.

A Truth and Healing Commission will:

- » Formally investigate and document the assimilation practices and human rights violations that occurred against Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.
- » Hold culturally respectful and meaningful public hearings for victims, survivors, and their families to testify on the impacts of these policies.
- » Be guided by a Truth and Healing Advisory Committee with representatives from tribal organizations, tribal nations, experts, survivors, and the faith community.
- » Develop a final report with recommendations for the federal government due no later than five years after enactment on policies and commitments to address the impacts of Indian Boarding School Policies.

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(February 2025)