



TESTIMONY OF TAMMY MORELAND
CHAIRPERSON
Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End
Homelessness

Before the
U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
Hearing on “State of Native American Housing”
June 13, 2023

Aanii Boozhoo, Niigaanii Animikii Benesi Ikwe ninidizhizikaaz,
Migizi nindoodem,
Odawa Anishinaabe Kwe ndawaa, Wiikwewang nindonjiibaa.

Hello, my name is She Leads in Front Thunderbird Woman, I am Bald Eagle Clan, an Ottawa woman from the place by the big bay.

My government name is Tammy Moreland, I am a tribal member of Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians.

I have the honor and responsibility of chairing the “Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to Prevent and End Homelessness,” which is a tribally-initiated and innovative approach to addressing housing and homelessness of American Indians in Minnesota. I am honored to appear before you today to talk about the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative’s work toward ending homelessness through state and federal change.

Thank you, Senator Smith for calling this hearing and for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative.



The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative was formed in 2014 when a group of tribal housing and human services staff in northern and central Minnesota began meeting together with some other supporting organizations to learn from each other about new resources and ideas for promising practices that help meet the unique needs of American Indians experiencing homelessness in Minnesota.

While American Indians are about 1% of the general population in Minnesota, American Indians are 12% of the homeless population in Minnesota. We gave shape to the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative to ensure that the voices of the disproportionately large number of American Indians in Minnesota who are experiencing homelessness is heard.

The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which was signed in 2014 by five Tribal Governments: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation, and White Earth Nation. The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa signed the MOU in 2018. The MOU provides a framework for us to plan and problem-solve together. It structures our efforts around our common purpose as we collaborate on actions that “address historical barriers and unique needs” of Tribal members experiencing housing instability and homelessness in the Reservation and urban communities where our Tribal members live.

The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative has two classes of members – voting members and non-voting members. Voting members are appointed by the Tribal Councils of their Tribal Governments, and are either Band members or descendants of Federally recognized Tribal Nations. Many of the voting members have lived experience with being homeless. The non-voting members provide technical assistance and support to the Collaborative, such as grant writing, reporting, and program implementation. American Indian culture and traditions are the foundation of the work done by the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative. Culturally relevant approaches have proven to be effective in addressing historical trauma and the trauma of experiencing homelessness.

In addition to the direct services that it provides, the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative has been a strong advocate for reforming state and federal law. We have been successful lobbying for changes to state and federal law because of our first-hand experience with homelessness and its root causes and because we never give up. The reforms to federal law that the Collaborative has accomplished with Senator Tina Smith and other allies on Capitol Hill means that not only Minnesota tribes will have access to increased federal funding support but hundreds of other



tribes throughout the United States will also be able to access those increased resources in our shared mission to reduce homelessness in Indian communities.

The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative is a true collaboration – it is rare to have a meeting where a tribe hasn't sent its representative. Our meetings have full agendas and rotate among our different reservations. The host tribe provides a meal to everyone and at times takes the other members on tours of housing or emergency shelters in its communities. Members regularly rely on each other to help if a Band member in need of assistance is located in a different part of Minnesota. The Collaborative pushes to be part of meetings at the state and federal level and holds lawmakers accountable when they “forget” to include tribes. The informal motto of the Collaborative could be, “Nothing about us – without us.”

The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative has a formal charter and policies and procedures that describe its decision-making process. Many decisions are made by consensus. When a vote is taken, it is very rare to have a vote that isn't unanimous. All members work to serve American Indians who are experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. The issue of -- whose client it is -- never affects this collaboration. Currently the Collaborative is meeting more frequently to budget for an increase in state funds and to explore how to improve reporting. Training and support are provided to members who might be understaffed or need extra help.

One of the reasons the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative was formed was to maximize resources for American Indians who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. In Minnesota, American Indians are more than 12 times more likely to experience homelessness and to be homeless longer than the white population. The most recent reservation homeless survey (conducted in October 2018) found that half of the people homeless on reservations were children, youth, and elders. Most people (77%) met the definition of chronic or long term homeless – homeless for over a year or having multiple episodes of homelessness over three years. Nearly half of the people surveyed (47%) had a chronic health condition that impacted their ability to work and find housing.

Homelessness looks different in reservation communities; it looks like 16 people living in a two-bedroom house that might not have running water or someone living in an ice house or camper year around. Before the reservation homeless survey was done in 2006, the belief was that Indians like to double up, that it was cultural preference. Yet the reservation homeless survey showed that 99% of the people surveyed who were doubled up in overcrowded households would take separate housing if it was affordable, safe and made available.



Applying for state funding as a collaborative increases the likelihood of getting funding and an adequate amount of funding. The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative has been able to streamline the application process by submitting one funding application for six tribes. The Collaborative has just contracted with a White Earth Band member to have a data coordinator to improve our data collection, reporting and financial reconciliation. The Minnesota Tribal Collaborative is working with state agencies on honoring data sovereignty. For centuries data on American Indians has been misused to blame tribes for the poor outcomes of their tribal members. It is imperative that entities that want data on homelessness and American Indians be taught how to respect tribal sovereignty. This is a complex task topic that usually requires some hard conversations. The members of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative have presented on this topic at a national level and are in the middle of ongoing conversations with state staff.

Our collaboration is successful because the members of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative are fearless. We usually take the hard way, not the easy way to accomplish our goals. And the goals aren't just for us but we think forward several generations. The Minnesota Tribal collaborative wants future generations to know that we came together with leaders to rewrite new rules for society about how to thrive together. We experienced immense challenges but, in the end, we succeeded. We want future generations to know this was a powerful generation that rose from adversities and we gave them legacies and resources to take inspiration from. We want them to look at us with awe and courage, as we went through a difficult period of struggle and triumph. We hope they talk about us as examples to emulate, as something to be, and to go onward to the future with. We want to end homelessness for our communities. The members of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative always show up, challenge the status quo, and hold ourselves and others accountable for change. We have made changes; significant changes and we intend to make more. We also believe that nothing about us should happen without us and we push to be part of meetings, funding, and trainings, always insisting that our voice be heard.

During the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tribes that are part of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative accessed state and federal resources to keep people housed and to quickly rehouse people who were homeless. We helped people stay safe and healthy from COVID-19. The six tribes that are part of the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative used nearly \$20 million in COVID relief funding from the federal government to keep 6,761 households in housing. Now we are working to address the opioid crisis and continue our work to end homelessness. We envision a future where everyone thrives not just survives.



Federal Requests

For Tribes to successfully end homelessness both on and off reservations, we ask for the following assistance from Congress –

1. Authorize Tribal Access to the Emergency Solutions Grant. Tribes and tribal organizations should have an equitable opportunity to benefit from this funding source so we can better provide a broader continuum of housing assistance and services to our homelessness populations both on and off the reservation.
2. Change the HUD Continuum of Care Definition. HUD's continuum of care definition of homelessness does not include severe overcrowding and substandard housing conditions to be considered when determining whether a person is homeless. In much of Indian Country, harsh winter conditions in isolated and rural areas mean homeless people have no options other than doubling up in already overcrowded homes or seeking shelter in flimsy, temporary structures like fish shacks.
3. Include tribes in a formula for pro rata distribution like territories are provided. Federal assistance rarely trickles down to Indian communities when it is sent through state governments. Provide tribes with greater access to more money for community planning and development purposes and Continuum of Care projects so tribes can meaningfully address the root causes of homelessness.
4. Support Tribal Efforts to Address Homelessness Among Tribal Members as They Move Between Reservation and Urban Communities. Mercurial federal policies have pushed American Indians into and out of reservation communities for decades. This disruption of community life is one of the root causes of homelessness. Today, the federal government should support tribal efforts to meet the needs of tribal members where they are today. This is a federal government problem that can be solved by tribes and the federal government working together.
5. Congress Should Push CMS to Approve a New Medicaid Encounter Rate Category of Housing Services. A comprehensive approach to continuum of care services relevant to people who are homeless, reflected in a daily encounter rate, would allow tribal



providers to have enough funding to pay for the inter-related services that are needed to help move clients from homelessness to housed and remaining housed.

Miigwetch! And thank you for your time and attention. By partnering together and sharing resources we can end homelessness for America's first people.

Tammy Moreland
Chair
Minnesota Tribal Collaborative To Prevent & End Homelessness
320-292-1942
Tammy.Moreland@millelacsband.com