

March 27, 2024

Statement Supporting the Establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States

As faith-based organizations, including representatives of religious denominations and congregations that operated many boarding schools for Indigenous children, we welcome the reintroduction of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act in the 118th Congress (S. 1723 and H.R. 7227). We urge all members of Congress to support this important legislation, and we hope for its passage and enactment this year.

We acknowledge that from the 1860s through as late as the 1960s, U.S. federal boarding school policies sought to assimilate Native children into white American culture. Recognizing that this policy was morally wrong and contrary to the teachings of our own faiths, many of us have begun finding and facing our own histories with respect to Indian boarding schools.

The research we have seen so far – from Native academics, researchers, tribal leaders, boarding school survivors and descendants, and others – documents an intense focus on cultural assimilation. These policies taught Indigenous children that their traditional lifeways were inferior. We have learned:

- children were separated from their families and communities, in many cases against the wishes of their parents, and sent far away from their homes;
- children were punished for speaking their Native language or practicing their traditional spirituality or culture; and
- children were physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abused.

Many children never returned home. We have learned that some of them died, either from disease or from abuse and lack of care, without having communication with their parents or their Tribal community. Numerous Native communities today do not know what became of their children who were taken away. The effects of this historical trauma continue to have a serious impact on many Native people and families, Tribal communities, and Tribal Nations today.

Much remains unknown about the Indian Boarding School Era and its impacts on Native communities. The Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative has begun a necessary process, but significant work lies ahead. The magnitude of the task and the federal government's central role in Indian boarding school policies necessitate the establishment of a formal federal commission to investigate, document, and acknowledge these past injustices.

Facing the sins of our past that were committed in the name of Christianity has been challenging, but it is also proven to be a tremendous blessing. Confronting the truth is a crucial first step toward laying a new foundation for right relationships with Native communities.

We ask you to bring the U.S. government into this process by establishing a strong federal Commission to look truthfully and rigorously at U.S. Indian boarding school policies. In consultation with Indigenous communities, the Commission should examine the harms caused by these policies and make recommendations to Congress to address historic and lasting imprints.

We look forward to working with Congress, the federal government, and Indigenous communities in all these efforts.

Signed,

The Episcopal Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Jesuit Conference Office of Justice and Ecology
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
United Church of Christ
The United Methodist Church – General Board
of Church and Society
Washington State Partners for Social Change

THE *Episcopal* CHURCH 

 Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

 **FRANCISCAN
ACTION NETWORK**

 Friends Committee
on National Legislation
Lobbying with Quakers

 Jesuit Conference
Office of Justice and Ecology

MAZON

A Jewish Response
To Hunger

 UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

 **CHURCH & SOCIETY**
General Board of Church and Society
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

 Partners for Social Change