

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

From the early 1800s through the 1960s, Christian churches collaborated with the federal government to create hundreds of boarding schools which Native American children were forced to attend. 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 (H.R. 7227; S. 1723) would change that. This bill 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 assimilation practices, attempted termination of Indigenous cultures and languages, and human rights violations.

This bill is deeply significant for tribal nations, which continue to navigate the intergenerational consequences of the boarding school era. For faith communities, the bill's mission also serves as an important act of reconciliation. Many denominations have stepped forward to acknowledge their complicity in the historic trauma of the boarding school era, and they are committed to participating in the truth-telling process.

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. Further, it is essential that the commission have the authority—such as the subpoena power granted in more than 15 other federal commissions—to access records that faith organizations have not voluntarily disclosed in order to facilitate the atonement and healing process central to this legislation.

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, and survivors.
- » 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 (*February 2024*)

Support and Co-Sponsor the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act

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