

## The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples Crisis: Progress in Congress



By Portia Kay Anthos Skenandore-Wheelock (Oneida)

The election of the first two Native American women to Congress, the appointment of Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) as secretary of the interior, and the proposals to direct billions of dollars to Indian Country are all positive signs of change in 2021.

In our advocacy of Native American issues, FCNL follows the priorities set by Native groups. As a result, one of our top priorities is legislation to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP). The crisis originated during settler contact and continues to plague Indian Country. Awareness and outreach efforts by survivors, their families, advocates, and tribal communities have made a difference over the years.

The National Crime Information Center recently reported that approximately 1,500 American Indian and Alaska Native missing persons have been added to its database. In addition, 2,700 cases of murder and nonnegligent homicide offenses have been reported to the government's Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

Within the first 100 days of the Biden Administration, Secretary Haaland created a new Missing and Murdered Unit in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services. The unit provides guidance and coordination for cross-departmental and interagency work addressing MMIP cases.

This was followed by President Biden declaring May 5 as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day. The president also committed to working with tribal nations in addressing the MMIP crisis, resolving cases, and confronting the underlying causes.

Legislation addressing the crisis—like Savanna's Act and Not Invisible Act—were signed into law in October 2019 and are currently in varying stages of implementation. Even when fully implemented, key pieces of this legislation often need to be re-authorized every few years or may need additional bills to strengthen it.

This year, for example, President Biden signed the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fix to Sustain the Crime Victims Fund Act of 2021. This law adds revenue sources to the Crime Victims Fund, which goes directly to victims. Funds also go to states and tribes to support more than 1,500 victim services organizations.

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*According to the Indian Law Resource Center, more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence, and more than half have experienced sexual violence. FCNL photo.*

## Progress in Congress *(from page 1)*

For several years, FCNL has been advocating for the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The House passed its 2021 VAWA reauthorization bill in March, with strong tribal provisions, but the Senate has yet to introduce their bill.

Reauthorizing VAWA is urgent since more than four in five American Indian and Alaska Native women experience violence in their lifetime. Every reauthorization of VAWA has increased resources to address the safety of Indigenous women.

The 2013 Violence Against Women Act included a pilot program to restore tribal criminal jurisdiction over non-Natives who commit certain crimes of domestic violence against tribal citizens on tribal lands. But the pilot program set strict limits on tribes that can participate in the pilot, and less than two dozen tribes have met the Department of Justice's requirements to successfully implement this restored criminal jurisdiction.

FCNL is advocating for the expansion of this program in the new VAWA reauthorization, as well as expanding the list of crimes that can be prosecuted under the law.

Despite inaction by the Senate, FCNL's advocacy for VAWA was strengthened by the Supreme Court's decision in the case *United States vs. Cooley*. In June, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the inherent authority of tribal nations to detain non-Indians suspected of committing crimes on tribal lands.

Upholding elements of tribal jurisdiction over non-Natives is critical to the continuation and expansion of the tribal jurisdiction provisions in the Violence Against Women Act. Advocating for legislation that addresses the MMIP crisis keeps momentum going for VAWA reauthorization.

It also helps tribes to better address the crisis in their own communities, by supporting tribally run and culturally appropriate prevention and treatment efforts.

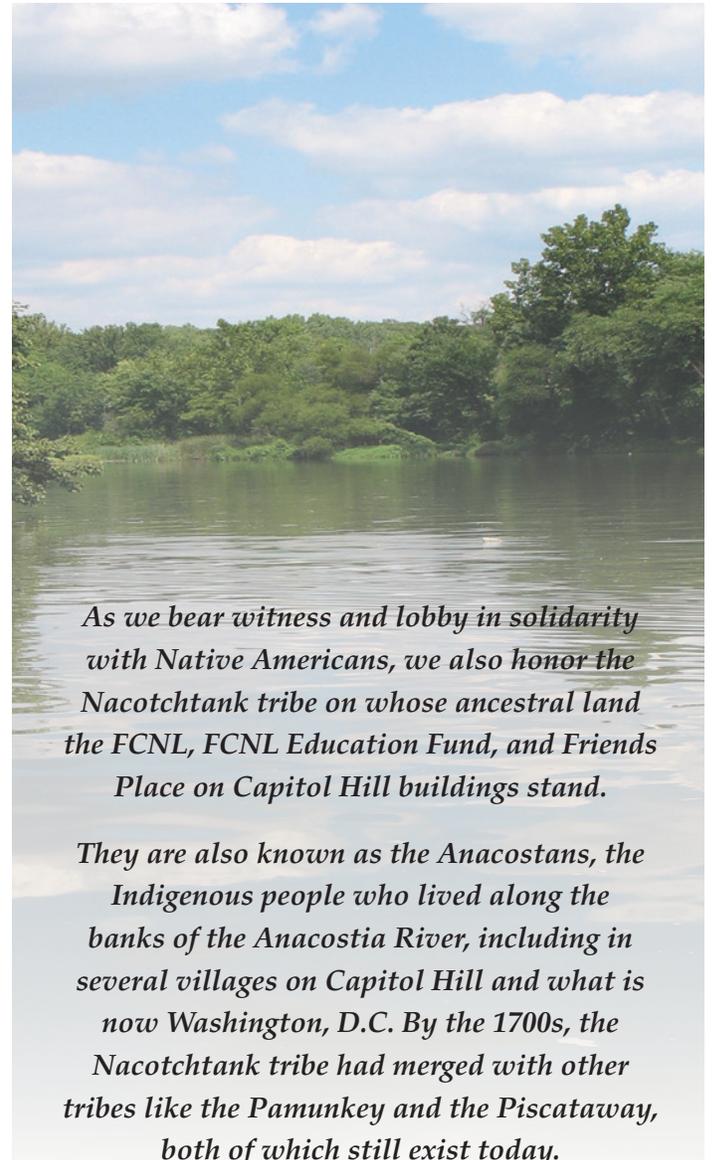
One such effort was through the Family Violence Prevention Services Act, which funds emergency shelters and supports related assistance for victims of domestic violence. It provides funding for an Alaska Native Tribal Resource Center on Domestic Violence and a Native Hawaiian Resource Center on Domestic Violence.

The reauthorization of this bill has bipartisan support and is headed to the House floor for a vote soon.

As a Quaker organization, FCNL affirms that opposing violence is not a partisan issue. Tribal nations and their citizens deserve stronger protections against non-Native perpetrators of violence on tribal lands.

Tell your member of Congress to support the Violence Against Women Act at [www.fcnl.org/vawa](http://www.fcnl.org/vawa).

*Portia Kay^nthos Skenandore-Wheelock (Oneida) is FCNL Congressional Advocate, Native American Advocacy Program.* 



*As we bear witness and lobby in solidarity with Native Americans, we also honor the Nacotchtank tribe on whose ancestral land the FCNL, FCNL Education Fund, and Friends Place on Capitol Hill buildings stand.*

*They are also known as the Anacostans, the Indigenous people who lived along the banks of the Anacostia River, including in several villages on Capitol Hill and what is now Washington, D.C. By the 1700s, the Nacotchtank tribe had merged with other tribes like the Pamunkey and the Piscataway, both of which still exist today.*

"Anacostia River" Flickr photo by Anosmia. Creative Commons.

# Indian Country in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic



*April 17, 2020 // Vehicles line up for COVID-19 testing outside of the Monument Valley Health Center in Oljato-Monument Valley, San Juan County, Utah. More than 1,000 people got tested over the course of two days. The Navajo Nation has one of the highest per capita COVID-19 infection rates in the country. (Kristin Murphy/ The Deseret News via AP)*

Indian Country has been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Native Americans, who currently number 9.7 million, have died from the virus at more than twice the rate of white Americans across the United States.

Elders, cultural knowledge keepers, and fluent speakers of endangered Native languages are among those lost. Even communities that made every effort to follow federal COVID-19 pandemic guidelines had unavoidable challenges to face.

Social distancing is difficult when up to five generations are living in one household. Frequent hand washing is impossible in areas without running water. Tribal economies were practically halted by shutdowns and stay-at-home orders. And even with recovery efforts, many tribal employees have not been called back to work.

The chronic underfunding of Indian Health Services (IHS) made personal protective equipment and adequate healthcare services scarce.

Tribal nations were largely left out of the development of the nation's public health infrastructure, but the federal COVID-19 response and recovery legislation is changing that. The \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allocated \$10.3 billion to tribes, including \$1 billion to the IHS.

This is as a part of the federal trust responsibility established in treaties between the federal government and tribal nations. This legal obligation requires the federal government to provide assistance to tribes, and Congress continues to work on legislation addressing these needs.

On August 10, the \$1 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (H.R. 3684) passed the Senate, but the final version still awaits a House vote. It allocates an additional \$11 billion to be invested in Indian Country for the following:

- » \$3.5 billion for the Indian Health Service Sanitation Facilities Construction Program
- » \$3 billion for the U.S. Department of Transportation Tribal Transportation Program
- » \$2.5 billion to address congressionally approved Indian water rights settlements
- » \$2 billion to expand broadband access on tribal lands and Hawaiian homelands

If passed by the House and signed into law, this will be one of the largest investments in Native communities in American history.

*(continued on page 6)*

# Quakers Grapple with Legacy of Indian Boarding Schools

By Bobby Trice



The recent discovery of 215 graves at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, in Canada's Tk'emlups te Secwepemc First Nations territory, has recentered a widespread reckoning with past government cultural assimilation policies. Some Quakers are responding by reflecting, learning about Friends' complicity in running Indian Boarding Schools, and starting to tell the truth about this history.

Following FCNL's tradition of witnessing in solidarity with Native Americans, we are amplifying the efforts of Native advocates to formalize this truth-telling process in current legislation. It's vital to ground these efforts in an honest history of the Religious Society of Friends' oppression of Indigenous people in North America.

Such oppression, rooted in white supremacy, has led to systemic discrimination and inequity that permeates our society today.

Starting with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the United States government systematically enacted cultural assimilation laws targeting Native Americans. The implementation of these policies led to Christian churches working with the government to found hundreds of boarding schools for Indigenous children.

Quakers ran more than 30 Indian boarding schools. The students faced cruel practices of child labor, forced assimilation, and physical punishments. In an 1869 letter, Friend Edward Shaw from Richmond, Indiana, wrote that Quakers participated "to protect, to Civilize, and to Christianize our Red Brethren."

Paula Palmer, who founded the Quaker ministry, Towards Right Relationships with Native People (see <https://friendspeaceteams.org/trrl/>), wrote in Friends Journal that Quakers were some of the staunchest proponents of cultural genocide. They advocated fully removing children from their families, believing "the whole character of the Indian must be changed."

Unlike some denominations, Quakers did not proselytize students. They refrained from proselytizing only because they believed Indigenous students could not appreciate Quakerism until they were fully assimilated.

As Quakers began to confront their complicity in this cultural genocide, they ask, "What does this history mean to us, as Friends, today?" Through action and education, Quakers are answering this question in different ways.



*Indian Boarding School, circa 1890–1914. Dale Jenkins postcard and photograph collection, National Museum of the American Indian.*

1583 - ENTRANCE TO INDIAN TRAINING SCHOOL, CHEMAWA, NEAR SALEM, OREGON.

As co-directors of Towards Right Relationship with Native Peoples (TRR), Paula Palmer and Jerilyn DeCoteau (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) have led the reflection and reckoning work among Friends by asking this very question in workshops around the country.



*Paula Palmer and Jerilyn DeCoteau (Turtle Mountain Chippewa)*

Some Friends are visiting the sites of Indian Boarding Schools as a pilgrimage. One Friend wrote to me saying, "Our family is visiting sacred lands, Indian Reservations, and Boarding schools .... To be in accompaniment, share witness, meet or support ... First Nations is our intention."

Last August, New England Yearly Meeting sponsored a plenary discussion with Friend Shirley Hager and gkisedtanamoogk (Mashpee Wampanoag), a respected elder, who co-organized a series of gatherings in the 1980s and 1990s. These were organized to build trust and find healing between settlers and Indigenous peoples.

On traditional Wukchumni land in California, Pacific Yearly Meeting Quakers and Wukchumni people hold an annual intergenerational spring service-learning camp. They hope that these camps will help heal relationships between Quakers and Wukchumni.

While these faithful efforts are important, Native advocates and FCNL know federal legislation is also needed to support a comprehensive investigation into the devastation these institutions—and Friends—inflicted and continue to inflict on Native peoples.

In early October, three members of Congress—Sen. Elizabeth Warren (MA), Reps. Sharice Davids (KS-03)

and Tom Cole (OK-04)—introduced the bipartisan Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States Act.

This bill would establish the first formal commission in U.S. history to investigate and document the attempted termination of cultures and languages of Indigenous peoples; assimilation practices; and human rights violations that occurred against American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians through Indian Boarding School policies.

This would complement the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative recently created by Interior Secretary Haaland. It "will address the inter-generational impact of Indian boarding schools to shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past, no matter how hard it will be."

**"I've known about forced assimilation for years. But this is raw .... I see how devastated my Native friends are .... Quakers were involved in some of these institutions. One of my Native friends wrote that she was NOT OK. Another told me, 'I'm trying not to be enraged in my mourning.'"**

– Jeff Kisling, "Space Between Stories, Worlds," Landback Friends

FCNL and Indigenous partners like the National Congress of American Indians and the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition have advocated for these efforts.

"For far too long, the truth of cultural genocide led by European-Americans at Indian boarding schools has remained hidden in secrecy and ignored," said FCNL General Secretary Diana Randall. "Christian churches, including Quakers, carry this burden of transgression against Indigenous people."

*Bobby Trice is FCNL Quaker Outreach Coordinator.* 

## Indian Country *(from page 3)*

The federal government has always been aware of the glaring infrastructure needs in Indian Country, but the pandemic worsened those needs as the rest of the country shifted to telehealth, working from home, and distance learning for children.

Affordable broadband access has become essential to everyday life, but at least half of tribal households do not have access to broadband connectivity. As part of the proposed American Jobs Plan, President Joe Biden

and many congressional leaders are determined to update the country's infrastructure and make high-speed broadband available to all Americans. This includes the further expansion of broadband on tribal lands.

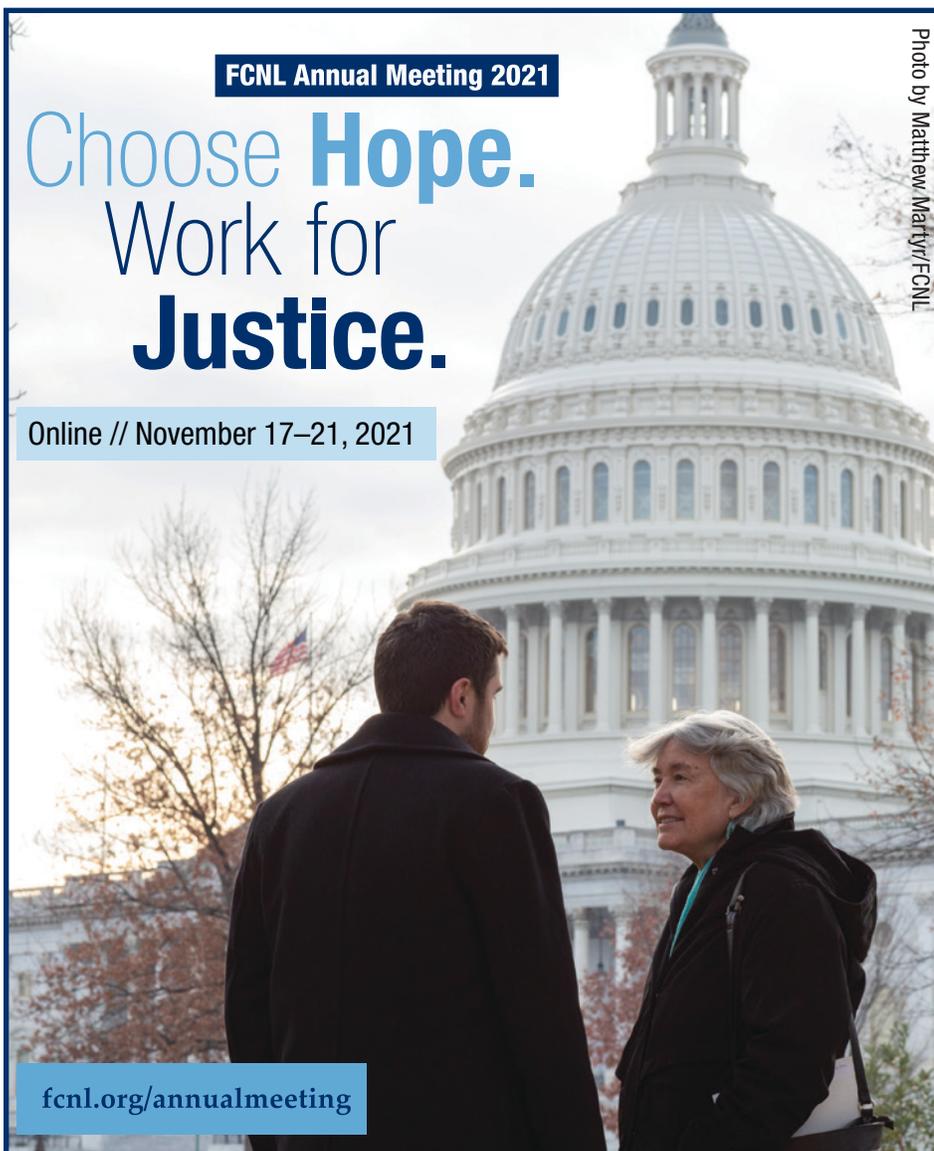
Through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, signed into law last December, new sources of tribal broadband funding is being provided through the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program.

This is a \$1 billion grant program for tribal governments, tribal

organizations, tribal colleges and universities, the Native Hawaiian community, and Alaska Native Corporations.

As Congress continues to address the nation's problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that legislators do not forget Indian Country.

Including tribal nations in the decision-making process with meaningful tribal consultation and adequately funding tribal programs is key. 



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Photo by Matthew Martyr/FCNL

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# Q&A: Advocating Native Issues

With Pat Powers

## How can Friends be allies with the Native community?

Native organizations most often ask for lobbying support. FCNL's monthly Native American Legislative Update makes that easy. Some Quakers want to become effective community educators.

While certain topics get lots of attention, we Friends rarely inform ourselves about the lack of basic funding that affects Native families across the country. The National Congress of American Indians publishes an annual report that has facts about issues such as housing, education, or environmental protection.

Nearer to home, I suggest locating your Indian commission; most states have one. If it meets near you, attend a meeting or two. If not, you can get on the mailing list to learn about tribal concerns in your area.

As a way to meet Indigenous leaders and communities, attend talks and events sponsored by tribes or Native groups in your region. In places such as Minnesota, there will be dozens to choose from any month; while in some states, there may only be multiple opportunities in November, which is Native American Heritage Month. By participating often, you will start to connect, if you listen.

## What is the Indian Affairs Committee of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM), and what has your role been in it?

At least four Yearly Meetings on the East Coast established Indian Committees as early as 1795, out of concern for tribes' great peril. Remarkably, those committees continue to this day, acting in support of Native objectives. I have been a clerk and member of Baltimore Yearly Meeting's committee, which has functioned in a quiet way as a study, educational, and advocacy group.

A surprising number of Friends have volunteered. Since 1940, over 183 individuals have served on the committee representing 39 Monthly Meetings. My book about the recent time period is entitled *Respect and Justice for Indigenous Peoples: A Quaker Advocacy Group's Experience Recounted*.

## What has the BYM Indian Affairs Committee accomplished?

One important advocacy project was influencing Maryland officials to let inmates who followed a Native spiritual practice exercise their freedom of religion rights, especially to have sweat lodges. Assisting the Monacan Nation to protect its ancient capital was another recent advocacy effort.

The committee has sponsored numerous educational events; has opposed mascots, names, and demeaning sports practices; and has prepared fact sheets on the Native populace of each state in the region. Do you know how many tribes there are in your state?

## You worked on Native American issues from 2003-2008 at FCNL. What were highlights of your time?

It is rare for federal legislation affecting Native peoples in a positive way to be passed. The only piece signed into law in the five years I was with FCNL was the expansion of the Native American Languages Act of 1990. It was nice to celebrate that victory.

However, the vitally important reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act kept being blocked. When it was incorporated into the Obamacare legislation, there was elation!

I also have to mention a 2006 FCNL media symposium entitled "Hear Our Story: Communications and Contemporary Native Americans." It had 22 Native and non-Native co-sponsors and dozens of prominent Native speakers, plus others such as the governor of Montana. I was very fortunate to be around remarkable Indigenous leaders.



*Pat Powers, a former FCNL staff member, actively volunteers with the Indian Affairs Committee of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting. She is a member of the Sandy Spring Meeting in Montgomery County, MD. Interview conducted by Alex Frandsen.*

## Viewpoint: Inspired by the Possibility of What Could Be



By Portia Kay^nthos Skenandore-Wheelock (Oneida)

I joined FCNL as the congressional advocate for the Native American Advocacy Program last June. But I started advocating for my community long before joining FCNL.

I was born on the Oneida Indian Reservation in rural Wisconsin. I experienced a unique upbringing by being raised in the small traditional longhouse community, while our family traveled back and forth to our ancestral homelands in Oneida, New York.

Growing up with this background rooted in Great Law teachings with contemporary calls to activism was essential in shaping my vision for what Indian Country is and what it can be.

After graduating college, I wanted to study law and policy because those have been the instruments used to oppress Native people for centuries in the United States. We need to have people trained in the law so we could use it to defend and advance the wellbeing of Indian Country as a whole.

FCNL presented me the opportunity to do exactly that. I was attracted to the Quaker approach to lobbying, which centers equity and the hope for a better world.

I have worked with the Quaker community before—as allies in grassroots efforts to stop hydrofracking in New York state and in the return of ancestral land behind the Mohawk Valley Friends Meeting Place to a group of Oneida women for the benefit of all Oneida people.

Building relationships with Quakers has created unique opportunities to work with Friends dedicated to similar



*In the mid-1990s, Portia traveled with her family to Alaska for an Indigenous Environmental Network gathering in the Chickaloon village.*

values of social, economic, and environmental justice that are held by my own traditional tribal community.

Now, four months after starting work here, I'm humbled by the work ahead and inspired by the possibility of what could be.

FCNL's advocacy on Native American issues has been going on for decades. We continue to build on this work today, advocating in solidarity with Native communities and creating more advocates for Indian country. The congressional advocate position accomplishes this by working closely with our consultant, Cindy Darcy, who has over 30 years of lobbying experience working on Native issues.

We are also greatly supported by many dedicated advocates across the FCNL network who are committed to improving the relationship with Indigenous people.

For the rest of this Congress, our program is focused on three core issues that the federal government has a role in addressing: The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples (MMIP) crisis, the consequences of Indian boarding schools, and infrastructure investments in Indian Country (including broadband internet).

I am hopeful that legislation addressing these issues can be passed by this Congress. The federal trust responsibility is the law of the land, and so many decisions made on the federal level truly impact daily tribal life.

Politics may be more divisive now than ever, but I am inspired by the opportunity for bipartisanship on Native issues that doesn't always exist in other policy areas.

That is why it is critical for decisionmakers to hear Indigenous voices. My hope is that my voice will be heard on the Hill and contribute to supporting the health, livelihood, and continuing growth of tribal communities all over Indian Country.

*Portia Kay^nthos Skenandore-Wheelock is the FCNL congressional advocate, Native American Advocacy Program.* 