



SEVEN WEEKS *of action for* **SEVEN GENERATIONS**

UPLIFTING S.2907/H.R.5444,
THE TRUTH AND HEALING COMMISSION
ON INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS POLICIES ACT.

TOOLKIT



**The National Native American
Boarding School Healing Coalition**



The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition's Mission:
To lead in the pursuit of understanding and addressing the ongoing trauma
created by the U.S. Indian Boarding School policy.

Dear Tribal leader, Native voters, and Allies,

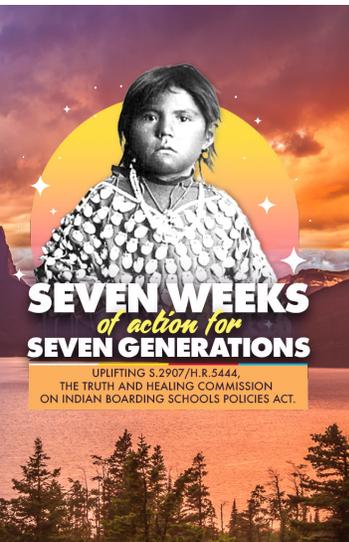
On September 30, 2021, the Senate introduced S.2907, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, with companion bill, H.R. 5444. This bill establishes the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States and sets forth its powers, duties, and membership.

With a Federal Commission, Indian Country can begin an overdue process to locate and analyze the records from the 408 known Indian boarding schools that operated in the U.S. These records, which may take several years to document thoroughly, are scattered across various archives, including: federal, state, hospital, church, private collections, and other unknown repositories. In addition to compiling records, a Commission would also serve a critical role in convening boarding school survivors along with a broad cross-section of Tribal representatives and experts in education, health, children, and families. We hope to finally create a process to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of Indian child removal.

With a foundational understanding, the US and Tribal nations can better understand the ongoing effects of the federal Indian boarding school policy era, which systematically and removed American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children from their families and forced them into boarding schools.

Native families have waited long enough to find out what happened to their relatives. Through our collective advocacy, we can create a commission that has the authority and resources to:

1. Protect unmarked graves of Native children and accompanying land protections.
2. Return federal Indian boarding school lands and facilities to tribes.
3. Gain access to documents and other information from churches, governments, and other institutions to know what happened.
4. Hold culturally appropriate hearings so boarding school survivors and their descendants can tell their stories about their experiences.
5. Gather information from subject matter experts.
6. Share findings publicly.
7. Develop a final report with recommendations for reconciliation, justice, healing, and restorative action.
8. Discontinue the removal of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiian children from their families and tribal communities by state social service departments, foster care agencies, and adoption agencies.



The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) strongly supports this legislation. We believe it is time for truth, justice, and healing for Indian Country. You can play a critical role in this effort by contacting your Congressional leaders to support the Truth and Healing Commission Bill on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (S. 2907 / H.R. 5444), a bipartisan bill. We have developed a toolkit of information and resources to help you contact your Congressional leaders and take action as an individual, family, and community. The table of contents below describes the materials in the toolkit:

Page 4: Fact sheet on S.2907 / H.R.5444

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We appreciate your commitment to advocating for this critical issue. Together, we can seek justice and resolution for many of our relatives who did not survive federal Indian Boarding Schools. The irreparable harm cannot be undone, but we as a country can begin to acknowledge and reconcile. That is the foundation for a future of healing that our boarding school survivors and their descendants deserve.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Sandra White Hawk

Sandra White Hawk (Oglala)
NABS President

“Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act” (S.2907, H.R. 5444)

WE HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Over the course of a century, hundreds of thousands of our children were taken or coerced away from our families and Tribes and forced to attend government and church-run Indian boarding schools. These schools were tools of assimilation and cultural genocide, resulting in the loss of language and culture and the permanent separation of children from their families. Survivors of Indian boarding schools have described physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse and neglect, while many other children died while in the custody of these schools, unable to share their stories.

To date, there has never been an accounting of:

- (1) the number of children forced to attend these schools;
- (2) the number of children who were abused, died, or went missing while at these schools; and
- (3) the long-term impacts on the children and the families of children forced to attend Indian boarding schools.

Developing a complete picture of the ongoing impact Indian boarding schools have had on generations of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people, is critical to providing a path toward healing for individuals, families, and Tribal communities that have endured the devastating consequences of Indian boarding school policies.



“It’s taken a long time to be able to share our stories and we’ve reached a point where the dam of awareness is bursting. The time for healing is now.”

– James LaBelle Sr. (Inupiaq), Boarding School Survivor

WHY A TRUTH AND HEALING COMMISSION ON INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS IS NEEDED

A Federal Commission is needed to locate and analyze the records from the 367+ known Indian boarding schools that operated in the U.S. These records are scattered across federal, state, hospital and church archives, private collections, and other unknown repositories, and may take years to fully document. In addition to the search for records, a Commission would also bring together boarding school survivors with a broad cross-section of tribal representatives and experts in education, health, and children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of this federal policy of Indian child removal.

As we have seen in Canada, the truth will eventually emerge about what is buried on Indian boarding school grounds. We have a limited amount of time to hear directly from survivors and record their stories. A Congressional Commission would help ensure that accounts of Indian boarding schools—told by survivors, families, and presently undisclosed records—are preserved, that our children who were forced to attend these schools are not forgotten, and that this destructive era of U.S. Indian policy is acknowledged so that future generations may understand this dark history and strive to do better.

KEY PROVISIONS OF S. 2907 AND H.R. 5444

A Full Inquiry into the Assimilative Policies of U.S. Indian Boarding Schools

- **Examines the location of children:** The investigation would locate and document all children still buried at or near boarding school facilities.
- **Documents ongoing impacts from boarding schools:** The Commission would compile evidence of the ongoing effects of intergenerational trauma in American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. It would also examine how assimilative policies attempted to destroy Native languages and cultures.
- **Locates church and government records:** The Commission would locate and analyze all records on Indian boarding schools. The targeted records include those related to attendance, infirmary, deaths, land, and other correspondences. The Commission would have the power to issue subpoenas to produce all records.

Collection of Testimony from Survivors, Tribes, and Subject Matter Experts:

- **Culturally-appropriate public hearings:** Provides a public forum for survivors, victims, families, communities, Native organizations, and tribal leaders to provide testimony on the impacts of Indian boarding schools.

- **Institutional knowledge gathering:** Testimony would be taken from those who have documents and institutional knowledge relating to Indian Boarding School Policies, including but not limited to testimony from churches, the federal government, state and local governments, individuals, and organizations.

Creation and Dissemination of Commission Findings and Recommendations:

- **Shares findings publicly:** Requires a final report on findings and recommendations to be shared with the public and the U.S. government within 5 years.
- **Provides recommendations:** Requires a list of recommendations for legislation and administrative actions to address the impacts of Federal Indian Boarding School Policies, expanding upon pre-established goals such as: investing in restoration of culture and language, and establishing trauma-informed resources.

Investigates Beyond the Department of the Interior Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative: Compiles all previous research and brings together partners for a comprehensive review of Federal Indian Boarding School Policies and their impacts, expanding upon the work of the DOI Initiative in order to know the magnitude of loss of human life.

Learn more at: boardingschoolhealing.org/truthcommission

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SCAN ME

Talking Points on S. 2907 / H.R. 5444

CORE MESSAGE: Every Native person in this country has the right to truth, justice, and healing from Indian boarding schools. The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act is overdue, and we urge our Congressional leaders to take action now. Native people endured over 150 years of boarding school policies; the truth cannot wait any longer.

TALKING POINT 1: EVERY AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN HAS A RIGHT TO TRUTH.

- **Example 1:** A Congressional Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies is the most comprehensive way to investigate and document the impacts, collect testimony from survivors, and develop recommendations to support healing from the long-term effects of this harmful policy.
 - » We have a right to know the truth about what happened in Indian boarding schools in the United States.
 - » This starts with an accurate accounting of the number of our relatives that were forced as children to attend these schools.
- **Example 2:** A Congressional Commission would build on and work collaboratively with the Department of the Interior's Boarding School Initiative, which is necessary to ensure that the required amount of time and resources are dedicated to uncovering the truth.
- **Example 3:** Boarding school records are scattered across federal, state, hospital, newspaper, church archives, private collections, and other unknown repositories. These records must be located, examined, and made available to survivors, their families, and Tribal Nations.
 - » We are calling on all organizations, churches, and government entities holding boarding school records to make them available for examination. A Congressional Commission would ensure that these records are produced.

TALKING POINT 2: EVERY AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN HAS A RIGHT TO HEALING.

- **Example 1:** Survivors of Indian boarding schools have described physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse and neglect.
 - » Every Native person in our country carries the trauma and harm of Indian boarding schools policies in their blood and genetic memory.
 - » To ensure this never happens again, we need to know the truth about the truth in this history.
- **Example 2:** The forced separation of children from their families and Tribal Nations was intentionally designed to destroy language and culture. These federal policies have dramatically impacted American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people for generations.
 - » To heal, we need to know the long-term impacts and implications these institutions have had on our children and families – past, current, and future generations.
 - » The irreparable harm cannot be undone, but we as a country can begin to acknowledge and reconcile. That is the foundation for a future of healing that our boarding school survivors and their descendants deserve.
- **Example 3:** There are unmarked graves and gravesites at boarding school sites across the country that must be protected. It is imperative Tribal Nations protect and reclaim these sites.

TALKING POINT 3: EVERY AMERICAN INDIAN, ALASKA NATIVE, AND NATIVE HAWAIIAN, HAS A RIGHT TO DIGNITY, RESTORATION, AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THEIR STORIES.

- **Example 1:** A Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools is a necessary first step for our country to address long, overdue injustices experienced by generations of our relatives.
 - » The time for healing is now. We cannot wait any longer.
 - » Our relatives deserve the dignity to share their stories of harm, trauma, and resilience.
- **Example 2:** The United States has never accounted for: 1) the number of children forced to attend Indian boarding schools, 2) the number of children who were abused, died, or went missing while at these institutions; and 3) the long-term impacts on the children and families of the children forced to attend these institutions. We need a Congressional Commission to answer these questions.
- **Example 3:** Our children and families are still dealing with the generational impacts of Indian boarding schools, and we demand restorative actions that are written in policy as well as direct resources that help our Tribal communities revitalize and restore our culture, language, and well being of our children, families, and Tribal Nations.
- **Example 4:** We believe that mental health and culturally specific trauma-informed resources are urgently needed for boarding school survivors and their families, especially as there are continued revelations about unmarked graves or deaths at these schools. A Congressional Commission would bring together boarding school survivors, Tribal leaders, and other experts to recommend what resources are needed.

Talking Points on S. 2907 / H.R. 5444 Continued...

CORE MESSAGE: Every Native person in this country has the right to truth, justice, and healing from Indian boarding schools. The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act is overdue, and we urge our Congressional leaders to take action now. Native people endured over 150 years of boarding school policies; the truth cannot wait any longer.



“When we begin to cry, that’s part of the healing process. Our tears are meant to cleanse us; they’re meant to cleanse our spirit, our mind, and our body. When we cried as children, no one was there. We were left to cry alone. But today, we have each other.”

Sandy White Hawk, Sicangu Lakota
Board President, NABS



CALL TO ACTION:

- We are in a time of truth-telling, so let’s take action together! We ask each of you to call key Congressional leaders to enact the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, which calls for:
 - » A Full Inquiry and accurate accounting into the assimilative Policies of the U.S. Indian Boarding Schools, including a complete examination of boarding school archival records and the ability to subpoena documents if not brought forward.
 - » Culturally appropriate public hearings for survivors, descendants, and subject matter experts to provide testimony and inform institutional knowledge gathering.
 - » The creation and dissemination of Commission findings and recommendations shared publicly will set the foundation for policy recommendations that work toward restoring the culture, language, and well-being of our children and families.
 - » A comprehensive investigation that goes beyond the Department of the Interior’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and builds upon all previous research.

CALL YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Please click here (<https://fiscalnote.com/find-your-legislator>) to find the phone number of your Senators. When you call their Washington, D.C., or district offices, consider delivering the following talking points to the staff member or intern who answers your call:

I am a constituent of Senator **[INSERT NAME]** from **[INSERT NAME OF RESERVATION, VILLAGE, OR HOMETOWN]**, and I would like you to relay my comments to the Senator. I am calling today about the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. I am pleased that the Senate has introduced a strong bipartisan bill (S 2907). I hope Senator **[INSERT NAME]** will support these provisions and Congressional leaders will work together in a bipartisan manner to send the bill, with these critical tribal provisions, to the President for his signature.

As a citizen of **[INSERT TRIBE HERE]**, I am incredibly concerned that we do not know where our children are buried. I urge Senator **[INSERT NAME]** to speak to his/her party leadership today in support of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act to become a cosponsor of the bill and to vote to pass S 2907 when it comes to the Senate floor. Thank you for your time, and have a great day.

Please CALL these Congressional Members Today and Request They Pass the **“H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act”**.

For nearly two centuries, the United States pursued, embraced, or permitted a policy of forced assimilation of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people. The Federal Indian boarding school system was developed to target Indian children to accomplish this policy objective for over 150 years and influence U.S.-Indian relations and U.S.-Native Hawaiian relations. The Department must fully account for its role in this effort and renounce the forced assimilation of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community as a legitimate policy objective.

To begin the process of healing from the harm and violence caused by the assimilation policy, the Department should affirm an express policy of cultural revitalization—supporting the work of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community to revitalize their languages, cultural practices, and traditional food systems, and to protect and strengthen intra-Tribal relations.



Scan the QR code to find
your legislator



SCAN ME

SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS
SAMPLE LETTER TO SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Brian Schat

Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

Vice Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.20510

Re: Pass S.2907 - Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act

Dear Chairman Schat and Vice Chairman Murkowski:

I am writing on behalf of the **[INSERT TRIBE/ORGANIZATION NAME]** to urge the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to support and pass S. 2907 - Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act out of Committee. This legislation will create a Congressional Commission to locate and analyze the records from the over four hundred known Indian boarding schools that operated across the country. This Congressional Commission will bring together boarding school survivors and tribal representatives, along with experts in education, health, and children and families, to account for the long-lasting impacts of the federal Indian boarding school policy. S. 2907 will also be an important additional measure to support the U.S. Department of the Interior's Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.

For over 150 years, hundreds of thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native children were taken, forced, or coerced to attend federal government-supported Indian boarding schools away from their families, communities, and Tribal Nations. These schools were part of a policy of cultural assimilation and genocide, the disposition of tribal lands, and produced long-lasting impacts, including the loss of Native languages and cultures. Many children taken from their families and Tribal Nations died at the boarding schools. These children were never returned home to their loved ones, and often their families were never notified of their deaths. The first Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report has helped shed light on the schools.

S. 2907 will ensure that there will be a full accounting of the Indian boarding schools and will promote truth, justice, and healing. **[I/WE]** urge the Committee to support the passage of S.2907 in the U.S. Senate.

Sincerely, **[INSERT NAME, TRIBE/ORGANIZATION, CONTACT INFO]**

Scan the QR code for the
sample letter template



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SOCIAL MEDIA - TWITTER



Congressional Leadership Twitter Handles:

[@SenSchumer](#)

(Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer)

[@LeaderMcConnell](#)

(Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell)

[@SenatorDurbin](#)

(Chair of the Judiciary Committee)

[@ChuckGrassley](#)

(Ranking Member of Judiciary Committee)

[@brianschatz](#)

(Chair of Indian Affairs Committee)

[@lisamurkowski](#)

(Co-Chair of Indian Affairs Committee)

[@SpeakerPelosi](#)

(Speaker of the House)

[@GOPLeader](#)

(House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy)



We have a right to know the truth about what happened in Indian boarding schools in the U.S. We call upon Congressional leaders to pass H.R. 5444. [@JayOberholte](#) [@RepBentz](#) [@RepRosendale](#) [@RepMcClintock](#) [@RepJerryCarl](#) [@RepHerrell](#) [@TomColeOK04](#) [@RepMullin](#) #7WeeksofAction #Time4Truth #NABS



Every Native person in our country carries the trauma & harm of the Indian boarding schools policies in their blood and genetic memory. [@JayOberholte](#) [@RepBentz](#) [@RepRosendale](#) [@RepMcClintock](#) [@RepJerryCarl](#) [@RepHerrell](#) [@TomColeOK04](#) [@RepMullin](#) #7WeeksofAction #Time4Justice #NABS



Our children and families are still dealing with the generational impacts of Indian boarding schools! [@JayOberholte](#) [@RepBentz](#) [@RepRosendale](#) [@RepMcClintock](#) [@RepJerryCarl](#) [@RepHerrell](#) [@TomColeOK04](#) [@RepMullin](#) #7WeeksofAction #Time4Justice #Time4Restoration



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SOCIAL MEDIA - FACEBOOK

TAG DEPARTMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES



[Partner organizational handle] joins @NNABSHC in 7 Weeks of Action for 7 Generations! Together Indian Country will highlight the need to pass H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act in the U.S. In our first week, we ask that you join us in calling your Congressional leaders and the 7 Representatives below.

Please CALL these Congressional members today and urge them to pass "H.R. 5444, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act" in the U.S.

- Rep. Jay Oberholte, CA-8, (202) 225-5861
- Rep. Bruce Westerman, AR-4, (202) 225-3772
- Rep. Cliff Bentz, OR-2, (202) 225-6730
- Rep. Matt Rosendale, MT, (202) 225-3211
- Rep. McClintock, CA-4, (202) 225-2511
- Rep. Jerry Carl, AL-1, (202) 225-4931
- Rep. Yvette Herrel, NM-2, (202) 225-2365
- Committee on Natural Resources Office, (202) 225-2761
- Rep. Tom Cole, (202) 225-6165
- Rep. Mark Wayne Mullen, (202) 225-2701



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- Committee on Natural Resources Office, (202) 225-2761
- Rep. Tom Cole, (202) 225-6165
- Rep. Mark Wayne Mullen, (202) 225-2701



We are in a time of truth-telling, so let's take action together! We ask each of you to call key Congressional leaders to enact the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (H.R. 5444). [@JayOberholte](#) [@RepBentz](#) [@RepRosendale](#) [@RepMcClintock](#) [@RepJerryCarl](#) [@RepHerrell](#) [@TomColeOK04](#) [@RepMullin](#) #7WeeksofAction #Time4Healing #Time4restoration #NNABS