



SPIRIT LAKE TRIBE

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February 4, 2025

Testimony in Support of HB 1565
Chairwoman Lonna Street, Spirit Lake Tribe

I write to you today on behalf of the Spirit Lake Tribe in strong support of House Bill 1565, a critical piece of legislation that seeks to establish funding for non-beneficiary students attending tribally controlled schools in North Dakota. This bill addresses a long-standing funding gap that has placed an undue burden on tribal schools, which are already significantly underfunded compared to state public schools.

At Tate Topa Tribal School on the Spirit Lake Reservation, we educate many students who reside within our community but are not eligible for tribal enrollment due to blood quantum requirements. Because they do not meet the criteria for federal funding designated for tribal students, our schools receive no financial support for their education. Despite this, we do not turn these students away—we educate them alongside enrolled tribal members because they are part of our community. However, the financial strain of absorbing these costs without adequate state or federal funding has stretched our limited resources and disproportionately affects the level of support and care we can provide to our students.

It is important to recognize these children simply as children in need of an education, not just as Native or non-Native students. Public school students on Spirit Lake receive \$11,072 per student under the state-funded school system. Meanwhile, the tribally controlled school, operating within the same building, receives \$11,072 per enrolled student but \$0 for non-enrolled students. This inequity leaves a significant gap in resources, forcing the school to absorb the costs without additional funding. These students do not fall under the purview of federal Indian Education funding due to not being tribally enrolled, yet they are still part of our community and deserve equitable access to educational resources.

State-funded public schools do not face this same burden, as they receive per-pupil funding for every student they enroll. Meanwhile, tribal schools are expected to educate non-beneficiary students without any corresponding funding, creating an inequitable system that disadvantages Native-serving institutions. Additionally, many tribal schools, including Tate Topa, lack the financial means to provide necessary secondary-level student support services, further limiting opportunities for academic success.

The passage of HB 1565 would correct this inequity by ensuring that tribally controlled schools receive grant funding to help cover the costs of educating non-beneficiary students. This investment would directly benefit students, allowing tribal schools to hire additional teachers, expand educational programming, and provide essential student support services that many of our schools currently cannot afford.

I urge this committee to advance HB 1565 and recognize the importance of equitable funding for all students within North Dakota's educational system. Our tribal schools are doing their part to serve every child in our communities—we ask that the state do its part in ensuring they have the resources to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lonna J. Street".

Lonna J. Street – Chairwoman Spirit Lake Tribe