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Testimony in Support of SB 2304

Requiring all elementary and secondary public and nonpublic schools in the State of North Dakota to include curriculum on Native American history.

Submitted by Clayton Small, PhD

March 8, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

I am submitting this written testimony in behalf of Native PRIDE, an American Indian non-profit organization located in New Mexico. I am an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne tribe of Montana, and my Cheyenne Name is Good Warrior. Our organization has developed two culture and resilience based curricula entitled, "Native HOPE" and "The Good Road of Life," endorsed by federal and state agencies and tribal leaders as effective culture based prevention and intervention approaches to strengthen culture resiliency and reduce risk factors among Native youth, adults, families communities, and organizations. Our approach is to strengthen the cultural resiliency among Native youth, and adults in a peer to peer process that creates a safe place for learning, understanding, and healing from the impact of historical and everyday trauma. In my 30 years experience as a trainer and facilitator of wellness and leadership training, our research shows that despite the impact of colonization, trauma, poverty and other social injustices, our Native students can be successful in school, as community members and leaders. Researchers report that when a student believes that they have control over an outcome and they are in fact responsible for their own successes, they are more resilient. An individual's belief about their own abilities and effectiveness are one of the strongest predictors of personal and academic success.

The history of colonization of Native peoples in North America tells a story of brutalization, exploitation, segregation, expulsion, and for some tribe's annihilation. An example is the boarding school era in the 19th and 20th centuries with the goal of assimilating Native children to the dominant European culture. These policies had Native children removed from their homes, forced to cut their hair, and not allowed to speak their Native languages or return to their homelands. They were given new names and identities, and were subject to sexual abuse, physical abuse, and mental abuse at U.S. federal government and parochial boarding schools. The impact of this trauma upon Native children and their

families resulted in a loss of culture, language and identity, as well as, the beginning of unhealthy multigenerational behaviors that are still being practiced among Native families.

Currently, there is ongoing negative stereotyping and racism that results in systems in place that create and maintain racial inequality for Native students, families, and communities. This is especially evident in towns and cities located near Indian reservations, and our school systems.

Today, more than 93 % of Native students attend rural or urban public or nonpublic schools that are located off reservation lands. Native students possess the highest drop out rates in the U.S. They are more likely to be placed in special education classes than any other racial or ethnic group in the nation. They are disciplined at the second highest rate in the nation.

There is a need for the education and training in the areas of diversity, equity, inclusion, systemic racism and trauma informed services.

The solution to stopping these behaviors is for children of trauma is to have a safe place in our schools to talk about these stressful situations. School personnel need to be trauma informed in order to create a safe environment for Native students to heal, thus breaking the cycles of multigenerational behavior.

It is my understanding that SB 2304 will use the curriculum entitled "OCETI-SAKOWIN adopted by the State Board of Education standards March 19th, 2018. This curriculum will be the framework for teaching students in grades 4-12, the Native history, and other important cultural teachings and values of the 5 sovereign tribes residing in North Dakota.

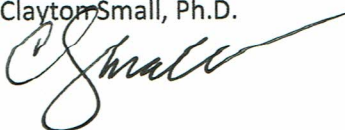
The passage of SB 2304 represents an opportunity to strengthen the cultural resiliency of Native students. Cultural resiliency is using Native culture to overcome trauma, tragedy, threats and other stresses in the lives of Native students, families and communities. These efforts to address the colonizing history of the American education system will change the context of education by affirming the specific tribal cultures, histories, language and other strengths of American Indian youth and communities. Bringing cultural teachings, trauma informed services and culture based prevention education into K-12 schools will strengthen resilience, educational outcomes and reverse the legacy of boarding school policies that failed our Native children. SB 2304 will instill hope for future generations.

This situation is a call to action not only to address the importance of Native History be taught in all the schools, but to incorporate trauma informed services, culture based prevention, intervention and social-life skills as critical components of SB 2304. Native students are for the most part, children of trauma and this requires a special skill set among educators working with them and establishing healthy relationships based upon trust and a safe environment for learning.

Lastly, the passage of SB 2304 is an opportunity for the State of North Dakota and the five sovereign tribal Nations to have truth and reconciliation and for the tribes to heal from the impact of colonization and to strengthen the education of their children. I urge the Congressional Delegates for the State of North Dakota to pass SB 2304.

Sincerely,

Clayton Small, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clayton Small", written over the typed name.