

Testimony of Jamie S. Azure
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Tribal Chairman
February 1, 2021

Chairman Klemin, members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Jamie S. Azure and I have the honor of representing the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa as Tribal Chairman. I've testified before the Tax Committee on September 4, 2020 and addressed the need for a drug task force and BCI office in Rolette County. There is an intricate web of the drug trafficking that happens on and around our Tribal lands. The State recently witnessed the result of an operation that involved individuals from Detroit and Kentucky operating within three Tribal reservations including the Turtle Mountain reservation in **Operation Blue Prairie**. Those individuals brought illegal opioids from Detroit by automobile and took up residence with Turtle Mountain members and dealt these illegal narcotics from within our local neighborhoods.

Please understand the sophistication of these operations. These criminals use trains, buses, and automobiles to bring poison into our area. In order to evade County Law Enforcement, these drug dealers will integrate themselves within our community with knowledge that BIA, Tribal, and County Law Enforcement will find the jurisdiction maze too complicated. They have trained criminally minded individuals within our community to utilize social media communication to avoid our Courts obtaining search warrants. Our Court issues FaceBook search warrants and FaceBook, routinely, denies them because our court is not a Federal Court. This hurdle can be addressed with a local task force that can collect intelligence through the appropriate channels.

As some of you may be aware, my office has been diligently seeking a Joint Task force to assist the area since the fall of 2019. Our general hope was quashed when we could not muster enough man-power to coordinate with the FBI, BIA, BCI, the Rolette County Sheriff's

Department and Tribal Law Enforcement. However, the Tribe does have a strong working relationship with Rolette County law enforcement. Presently we provide support and they provide support to our forces. To ensure Rolette County had the necessary forces, Sheriff Gustafson deputized all of our BIA and tribal law enforcement to provide necessary coverage during this present pandemic.

Please be aware that a related bill is before the Senate which will grant ND Post Board commissioned tribal law enforcement the authority to aide Rolette County when called upon. It has already passed the House. Presently, Tribal Law enforcement authority stops at the reservation line. Please note that Tribal Law Enforcement attend the sixteen-week Indian Police Academy in Artesia, New Mexico. Once qualified and completed they must maintain their certifications with annual training for 40 hours of classroom work and twice annual firearms certification.

In the past six weeks BIA OJS has provide my office with the statistics for law enforcement calls. A total of 903 calls for service in those six weeks. There were 10 drug calls and 84 property crimes reported. We have learned that most of the property crimes are drug related. Unfortunately, we have also learned that many of the sex crimes are drug related. Please note that our law enforcement is operating at 68% capacity with five (5) vacant positions. This stretches our officers thin, also causing stress and burn out. Coupled with this burden these drug problems have dramatically increased the burden on our child protection system. We estimate that 75 % of the 432 children we had in foster care in August, were in and out of home placements due to parental or other guardian drug use.

In order to stop the delivery of drugs to the community we are requesting the opportunity for a Tribal/State joint task force that will assist in reducing the drugs within our Tribal lands and

surrounding communities. We are working diligently to provide recovery programs for our people, but are short on the person power to conduct operations for drug interdiction. The present BIA officer who provides drug interdiction serves 3-4 reservations, is based out of Rapid City and relies on FBI and BCI for intelligence. The area needs more resources.

We appreciate the work and change in law associated with BIA law enforcement, which allows the department to be treated as a regular federal officer. This has assisted in providing law and order. In the last week, the BIA -OJS has advised that they would like some changes in proposed mutual aid agreement with Rolette County. Unfortunately, we have been waiting for a BIA Solicitor to provide those changes since July of 2018. Please note that many County Law Enforcement are Tribal Members, we are a mutually supportive community with Rolette County and work to support each other with services and economic support.

We are working towards another mutual aid agreement with ND Highway patrol but are waiting for a draft back from the ND Attorney General's Office. As you know we have been working tireless for improvements to the community, we would appreciate this support from the State to the area.

The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa has taken the initiative in recent years. Our Tribe has invested in ourselves with the announcements of a Tribal Recovery Center, supplying the funds for night differential/overtime for our Tribal Law enforcement, the announcement of a new detention center breaking ground this spring, and even passing Tribal Law instructing the Dept. of Justice that our Tribe will not allow our officers to be detailed out. Many of these initiatives and more are done on already stretched thin Tribal budgets from our general accounts as we all recover from a Global Pandemic that has affected us all. I look forward to a True Partnership as we progress into 2021 and make an impact into these issues that face us all. Thank You.