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March 13, 2023

**NATIVE, Inc.**  
**Testimony in Support of HB 1447**  
**Senate – Human Services**

Madam Chair Lee and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lorraine Davis, Founder and CEO of a Native American-led community-based organization called NATIVE, Inc. serving Native Americans and other underserved populations living in the Bismarck and Fargo urban areas of North Dakota (ND) with community-based education and housing, workforce, behavioral health, and criminal justice prevention services. Our role fills gaps in culturally responsive community-based services in ND. It has been helpful for us to expand the number of Native American (i.e., those targeting expertise in serving Native Americans) behavioral health and law professionals by working with the ND Department of Human and Health Services (NDHHS), local colleges, ND Universities to support Native students; serving as training sites and facilitating collaborative relationships to support this workforce development role, and supporting the integration of traditional medicine in recovery and prevention services.

I am here today in **support of House Bill 1447** and ask this committee to designate funding toward contracts to Tribal and urban Indian community-based behavioral health service providers to provide traditional healing practices at \$2 million from the Opioid Settlement Fund.

Recent research from GoodRx finds that over 113,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) live in a county that lacks an adequate amount of mental health providers, with some having fewer than one mental health provider available for every 30,000 people.<sup>1</sup>

Federal Indian policy provides resources for Tribes and those living on tribal reservations, however, the shift in population migration into urban areas and findings from health disparities research confirm that public and private sector efforts to improve healthcare quality and reduce disparities must assist and recognize Tribal members living in cities. In treating Native American patients, it is important for health care professionals to understand this population's culture and history. With few AI/AN health professionals, and with many primary caregivers lacking sufficient mental health training, urban Indians are not receiving adequate mental health care. To effectively treat urban Indians, healthcare and behavioral health professionals must understand, accept and work with urban Indians' unique cultural and historical perspectives.<sup>2</sup> AI/AN individuals have worse health outcomes than other ethnic and racial groups in the US.

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<sup>1</sup> Chase L, Cisneros T. More than 100,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives struggle to get mental health care. GoodRx. November 23, 2022. Accessed January 10, 2023. <https://www.goodrx.com/healthcare-access/research/american-indian-alaska-native-mental-health-deserts>.

<sup>2</sup> Urban Indian Health Commission. Invisible Tribes: Urban Indians and Their Health in a Changing World. <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2015-10-13/invisible-tribes.pdf>.

According to a 2020 report provided by CDC Wonder,<sup>3</sup> populations with higher drug overdose death rates:

- Men twice more than women
- Adults ages 35-44
- AI/AN, White and Black adults
- Urban populations compared with rural populations

The data show that at the national level, AI/ANs suffer disproportionately from depression and substance abuse and, with the exception of private psychiatric hospitals, are overly represented in in-patient care relative to Caucasians.<sup>4</sup> For AI/AN, generational and historical trauma is believed to be a root cause of substance use and poor mental health.<sup>5</sup> While the Indian Health Service (IHS) provides needed care in tribal areas, it is indeed an underfunded program. Although most IHS clinics and hospitals provide services at no cost to tribe members and are located on reservations, 87% of those who identify as AI/AN live outside of tribal areas.<sup>6</sup> This means most Tribal members live off the reservation. 49,144 tribal members live in ND.<sup>7</sup> Amongst the five Tribes of ND, 45% live off their respective reservations.<sup>8</sup> 10,942 of NAs live in the Bismarck metro area, 4,862 of NAs live in Fargo metro area and 3,586 of NAs live in Grand Forks metro<sup>9</sup>

Unaddressed relevant trauma-informed practices relevant to indigenous populations is the result of other significant statistics to mention.

- 56% of Native American women in our country have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime. And 84% of Native American women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime.
- Over 50% of Native American children are in ND's foster care system.
- The number of females incarcerated population continues to grow. 83% women in ND prison have a substance abuse diagnosis, 27% of women in ND prison have a serious mental illness diagnosis.<sup>10</sup>
- According to the ND Juvenile Justice Division, 79% of all custodial youth suffer with mental health issues, 72% have substance abuse issues, 85% have family instability

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<sup>3</sup> America's Health Rankings analysis of CDC WONDER, Multiple Cause of Death Files, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org, accessed 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Minority Health Web site. "American Indian & Alaska Native (AI/AN) Populations." <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Populations/AIAN/AIAN.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Behavioral health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives: for behavioral health service providers, administrators, and supervisors. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Accessed January 10, 2023. [https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/tip\\_61\\_aian\\_full\\_document\\_020419\\_0.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/tip_61_aian_full_document_020419_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> American Indians and Alaskan Natives in the United States. United States Census Bureau. Accessed January 10, 2023. [https://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/DC2020/AIANWall2020/2020\\_AIAN\\_US.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/DC2020/AIANWall2020/2020_AIAN_US.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

<sup>8</sup> North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission. <https://www.indianaffairs.nd.gov/tribal-nations/statistics>

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2017

<sup>10</sup> ND Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Presentation to 2023 ND Legislation.



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issues, 75% have academic problems, 99% have criminogenic risk factors, 96% have issues with cognitive reasoning and 85% lack adequate social skills.<sup>11</sup>

**Designated funding from the Opioid Settlement Fund would:**

- Allow Native American community-based organizations and ND Tribes to provide traditional healing services to Tribal members living on and off the reservations.
- This would allow our system of care to incorporate AI/AN traditions and culture in the program design, settings, and staff development into ND's system of care. Incorporating AI/AN traditional practices and cultural values to recovery treatment models can increase opportunities for an individual to heal, improve well-being, reconnect to traditions, and increase a spiritual recovery to aid in attaining/maintaining sobriety.

**Listed below are culturally specific programs that are used in some communities.**

- American Indian cultural healing curriculums. For example, White Bison curriculums.
- Smudge for prayer and proper use of natural medicines for spiritual connections and healing.
- Sweat Lodges. A sweat lodge is a place of purification where the ceremony is practiced by many AI/AN who seek to heal, gain wisdom, and to give gratitude and pray for others. Traditionally, a sweat lodge uses intense heat where some use heated stones placed inside the lodge with water poured over the rocks to produce steam. Ceremonial prayers and songs that are unique to Tribal beliefs and practices of the specific sweat lodge and community are conducted. This tradition is used by recovery centers in our country serving AI/ANs to help with an individual's recovery process for mental and physical healing. Sweat lodges have been shown to increase an individual's spiritual and emotional well-being, particularly those in recovery with substance abuse disorders.
- Healing Ceremonies. While too extensive and diverse to list here in full, the use of ceremonies in the recovery process is central and integral to AI/AN communities. Ceremonial spaces offer AI/ANs safe, sober, and supportive gathering spaces to express traditional forms of healing practices. These approaches to healing are as diverse as the Tribal individuals practicing them. These can include sweat lodges, talking circles, prayers, smudging, and meetings with traditional/spiritual healers. However, the commonalities of ceremonial practice and outcomes on AI/AN individuals in recovery are central to respecting and supporting the fullness of healing from the effects of OUD. All efforts should be made to acknowledge, respect, and support the revitalization of these ceremonial practices with the utmost reverence and flexibility for how communities implement these practices. Since ND has a Native American behavioral health service provider in the two major metro areas, we could pilot the design and implementation of traditional healing practices for those desiring it. Particular efforts should be made to educate funders and agencies on the importance of ceremonial practices and emphasize community-based evaluation approaches to traditional forms of healing.

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<sup>11</sup> ND Juvenile Justice Division. Presentation to 2023 ND Legislation.

With a workforce shortage of clinicians across our country and state and the rapid increase of opioid addiction and criminal activity, this is an opportune time to pilot traditional healing services in our state. Our organization has the leadership and staff capacity with knowledge and experience to provide these services.

Culturally informed and responsive services to all Tribally diverse members are critical to the recovery of trauma and addictions as we related to our traditional way of life and spirituality. These services will increase:

- Self and Tribal identity development is critical to overcoming addiction and restorative justice work.
- In urban areas, we provide resources and access to these resources which are informative across jurisdictions of State, Tribal, and Federal law as it pertains to Tribal populations, as we are not merely a minority race but are members of federally recognized nations and our treaties and those obligations which are not and have never been fully met by the federal government.
- NATIVE, Inc. has formal support from the five Tribal Nations of North Dakota to serve their respective tribal members living in urban areas of ND.

In closing, ND has an opportunity to invest in an innovative approach toward addressing the opioid addictions for a disproportionately represented Indigenous population impacted by the opioid drug epidemic.

Thank you for your time. I stand for any questions.