

**EXAMINING THE COVID-19 RESPONSE IN NATIVE
COMMUNITIES: NATIVE LANGUAGES ONE YEAR
LATER**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 26, 2021

Printed for the use of the Committee on Indian Affairs



U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

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**EXAMINING THE COVID-19 RESPONSE
IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES: NATIVE
LANGUAGES ONE YEAR LATER**

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:05 p.m. in room 628, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Brian Schatz, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BRIAN SCHATZ,
U.S. SENATOR FROM HAWAII**

The CHAIRMAN. Good afternoon. During today's oversight hearing, the fourth of this Committee's COVID-19 response series, we will examine the pandemic's impact on Native American languages. We will also consider two bills, S. 989, the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2021, and S. 1402, the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021.

More than 30 years ago, Congress formally rejected past Federal policies that tried to silence Native American languages. When we enacted the Native American Languages Act in 1990, the U.S. expressly recognized the inherent rights of freedoms of Native Americans to use their indigenous languages.

Since then, Congress has continued to build on the foundation of this law, passing legislation such as the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 that supported maintenance and revitalization of Native American languages.

But the most important work has been done by Native communities themselves at the grassroots level to build their own Native language schools and programs and revitalize their languages and their cultures. These efforts have been transformational. In Hawaii, more than 18,000 people now speak Hawaiian at home, up from just 2,000 Hawaiian-language speakers in the 1970s.

But even with increasing Federal support over the last three decades, many Native languages remain endangered. Then COVID-19 hit. Native language schools had to be suspended in terms of their operations, and efforts to record and document endangered languages came to a halt. Native language speakers were lost to the virus.

Congress responded by including \$20 million in dedicated funding to address the pandemic's impact on Native languages in the

American Rescue Plan. But while help is here, this Committee's work to support Native languages does not stop at COVID-19 recovery. The two bipartisan Native language bills that we have before us today will advance this conversation, improving Federal support for culturally based Native language instruction and ensuring Native languages are used and continue to grow and get support.

The Native American Language Resource Center Act will authorize funding to establish a national center to share best practices and resources that support Native language use, revitalization and instruction. The Durbin Feeling Native American Language Act, named after renowned Cherokee linguist and Vietnam Veteran who passed away on August 19th, 2020, will make the Federal Government more accountable by setting clear goals and asking for direct input from Native communities about how Federal resources can be more effectively managed to support and revitalize Native languages.

Before I turn to the Vice Chair, I would like to extend my aloha to Ms. Laehā, and my thanks to our witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to hearing the unique perspectives of each of you and I look forward to this conversation.

Vice Chair Murkowski.

**STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI,
U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My apologies to you and to the Committee and to the staff for my late arrival. I thank you for being so good and conscientious in passing through S. 1471, the Safeguarding Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act of 2021. Senator Heinrich has worked on it so hard. I have been a partner with him on that for a period of time. So we thank you for that.

And we look forward to not only being able to get it through the Committee, but doing more. Speaking with you and your leadership in helping us unbundle some of our bills that we do a good job moving them through the Committee, then they get stalled out on the Floor. We want to be working with you to try to get these important measures signed into law. We have a couple of them in front of us today. You have given good detail in your opening here.

But know that the emphasis that we are placing on Native languages is so critically important. I think we recognize that these are more than just words. They are a vital part of indigenous culture and identity, and an important tool to understand indigenous histories and continue cultures for future generations.

As you know, as I have done my opening statements, I tried to incorporate into our Committee proceedings some words or phrases from some of the 23 Native languages that are spoken in Alaska. Some of them are pretty simple, *cama'i*, I have that one down. That is a greeting in the Alutiiq and with the Yup'ik people.

But each time I have done this, I have done so with the intent to recognize the importance of preserving these languages, that this action, language normalization, is a recommendation from the Alaska Native Preservation and Advisory Council. This is an entity that was formed in 2012 to advise both the Governor and the State of Alaska, the legislature there, on programs, policies and projects

to provide for cost-effective preservation, restoration and revitalization of Native languages.

So as I use these words and phrases, I hope to bring some of that culture to this Committee.

Mr. Chairman, as you have pointed out, in some parts of the Country, we have seen a resurgence in languages; in others we have seen things go in the opposite direction. Of the more than 20 Alaska Native languages, only one can be considered stable. Two of them are no longer spoken, and other half of them have fewer than 20 remaining speakers.

That is pretty telling. Only one can be considered stable, two no longer spoken, over half of them, more than 20, have fewer than 20 remaining speakers. So we have some work to do.

We will hear this afternoon from one of our witnesses, Mrs. Yaayuk Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle. Bernadette serves as the Chair of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council. She teaches Inupiaq. Her family is originally from King Island, Ukivok. She spoke only Inupiaq until she entered kindergarten at age 5. She is one who has not only been a strong leader in Native preservation in Alaska, but she is part of a cohort of Alaska Native language preservation specialists who have chosen to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Hawaii, your Hilo campus, with the Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization Program. Great lady there, we are pleased to have her before the Committee.

Mr. Chairman, I have a lengthy and very well-articulated opening statement that I would like to incorporate in full as part of the record, and have an opportunity to turn to our witnesses.

[The prepared statement of Senator Murkowski follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S. SENATOR FROM ALASKA

Cama'i! Good afternoon and thank you Chairman Schatz for convening today's hearing on Native Languages.

Native languages are more than just words, they are a vital part of indigenous culture and identity and an important tool to understand indigenous histories and continue these cultures for future generations.

As many of you know, I am attempting to incorporate into our Committee proceedings words and phrases from the 23 Native languages spoken in Alaska. Sometimes it has been a simple greeting as Cama'i—which is a greeting in the language of the Alutiiq and Yup'ik people. Each time I have done so with the intent to recognize the importance of preserving these languages. In fact, this action—Language Normalization—is a recommendation from the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council; an entity formed in 2012 to advise both the Governor and State Legislature of Alaska on programs, policies, and projects to provide for the cost-effective preservation, restoration, and revitalization of Alaska Native languages in the state.

The words and phrases are part of the culture and everyday life of the various Indigenous communities we represent here in the United States Senate. Each time I use these words and phrases, I hope to bring some of that culture to this Committee.

With that said, before I proceed to the rest of my opening statement I want to take a moment to discuss something that I hope is not lost upon everyone participating in today's hearing. The history of federal Indian policy pertaining to American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian languages has not always been great. In fact, at times it was outright harmful to native communities. In many instances, those previous harmful policies are the cause of a cycle of trauma, which the Committee has seen reflected in the issues facing many native communities today.

However, in stark contrast to those harmful policies the Committee is here today with a different purpose. Today the Committee will discuss two bills that provide much needed language preservation resources to tribes, and hold accountable federal agencies mandated with implementing policy that provides assistance for Native language preservation and resiliency. So today, I am both hopeful and committed to continue moving this body in a positive direction to strengthen Native languages.

We will begin that effort today by looking at two bills before the Committee, Chairman Schatz's bill, S.989, the *Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2021*. This bill, as Chairman Schatz had already described, would authorize the Department of Education to establish, operate, and staff a Native American language resource and training center that will serve as a resource to improve the capacity to teach and learn Native American languages.

And S. 1402, the *Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021*. I am proud to again join as co-lead on this measure to protect Native languages. Our bill will improve interagency coordination and require a survey of federal programs on their work involving Native languages. Through these efforts, Native communities across the country can continue revitalizing and protecting their identity through language.

I look forward to receiving testimony from our panel regarding these two pieces of legislation, and the potential impact they may have in Native communities.

The Committee will also receive testimony from the Administration for Native Americans on their efforts to assist in Native language preservation. Section 11004 of the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* directs the Administration for Native Americans to provide \$20 million in emergency grants for Native American language preservation and maintenance during the COVID 19 pandemic. I look forward to hearing from Acting Commissioner Sauve on what ANA is doing to ensure the survival and continuing vitality of Native languages during and after the pandemic.

Finally, I want to introduce and welcome one of today's hearing witnesses, Mrs. Yaayuk Bernadette Alvanna Stimpfle. Bernadette serves as the Chair of the Alaska Native Language Preservation & Advisory Council, and teaches the Inupiaq language. Her family is originally from Ugiuvak (King Island). She spoke only Inupiaq until she entered kindergarten at age 5. In addition to the many hats that Yaayuk wears, she is also part of a cohort of Alaska Native language preservation specialists who have chosen to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Hawaii, Hilo Campus with the Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization Program.

Mr. Chairman as you know there are many things our two states share, and this now includes training our Alaska Native language preservation specialists. My staff have also been briefed previously by the 'Aha Pūnana Leo on Hawaiian language immersion programs. I've also heard from Native language leaders in Alaska, such as Dr. Worl, that they owe their thanks to the Hawaiians. What they are doing with their young people—they gave many Native people of Alaska a sense that they can also do it. I know this sharing and learning has led to lifelong friendships between Alaskans and Hawaiians.

As pointed out by Professor Twitchell, from the University of Alaska Southeast, who is also a graduate of the Hawaiian and Indigenous Language and Culture Revitalization PhD. program at the University of Hawaii Hilo, there is an ongoing and worsening language crisis taking place in Alaska. Of the more than 20 Alaska Native languages, only one can be considered stable, 2 of them are no longer spoken, and over half of them have fewer than 20 remaining speakers.

I would like to end my opening statement with a quote from the Advisory Council's 2020 report. Tlingit Language and Culture Bearer Marsha Guneiwti Hotch said, "I am a speaker of my language and one of the younger birth speakers. Alaska Native languages are very important to me because it is the indigenous peoples right to have access to their language. Learning about indigenous history and learning who we are helps us to be connected to the lands and our ancestors who have lived and roamed these lands from time immemorial. . . . Alaskan Native Languages are not just important to me as a speaker but even to the rest of the world." I believe this quote perfectly captures why this Committee needs to continue highlighting this issue, and why I will continue to work on it.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, and the rest of the Committee on this important issue.

Thank you, quyanaq, to all of our witnesses for participating today. We welcome and value your comments and answers to questions from the Committee.

With that Mr. Chairman I look forward to this discussion.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Vice Chair Murkowski.

We will now turn to our witnesses. I am going to introduce them all in turn, and when it comes to the testifier from Minnesota, I will turn it over to Senator Smith.

First, we have Ms. Michelle Sauve, Acting Commissioner, Administration for Native Americans. Then we will have The Honorable Chuck Hoskin, Jr., Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation.

Senator Smith, would you like to do your introduction now?

**STATEMENT OF HON. TINA SMITH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM MINNESOTA**

Senator SMITH. Thank you. I would be delighted to.

Thank you so much Chair Schatz and Vice Chair Murkowski. Thank you so much for holding this hearing today.

It is my honor to introduce one of our witnesses today, Leslie Harper, who is President of the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs. Leslie is a member of the Leech Lake of Ojibwe in Bemidji, Minnesota. So boozhoo, Leslie.

Ms. Harper has been an innovator in founding the Niigaane language immersion program, which teaches the Ojibwe language to students kindergarten through sixth grade, and driving the conservation on Ojibwe language preservation. Leslie's insight as an educator and an administrator is really impressive. I think that the Committee will learn a lot from her testimony about why Native language instruction is important in Minnesota and across the Country.

Leslie, I look forward to hearing your testimony about the benefits of Native language education and preservation. We are very happy to have you with us today. Miigwech for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Smith.

Following Ms. Harper, we will have Ms. Ka'iulani Laehā, Chief Executive Officer of 'Aha Pūnana Leo, from Hawaii. Then we will Ms. Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle, Director of Kawerak Eskimo Heritage and Chair, of Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council in Alaska.

I want to remind our witnesses that your full written testimony will be made part of the official hearing record. Please try your very best to keep your statement to no more than five minutes, so that members have time for questions. We are also in the middle of a series of Floor votes, so the better we can keep to the five minutes, the more efficient our hearing will be.

We will start with Ms. Sauve.

**STATEMENT OF MICHELLE SAUVE, ACTING COMMISSIONER,
ADMINISTRATION FOR NATIVE AMERICANS, DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Ms. SAUVE. [Greeting in Native language.] Chairman Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski, members of the Committee, it is my honor to testify before you today about the impact of COVID-19 on Native languages and cultures.

I am Michelle Sauve, the Acting Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans, and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Native American Affairs, Administration for Children and Families, for ACF. I am also a proud member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe.

As the Acting Commissioner, I oversee implementation of the Native American Programs Act, including the Esther Martinez Immersion, EMI, and Native Language Preservation and Maintenance Grant programs. ANA's language programs provide the largest Federal support for indigenous communities to ensure the survival of their languages.

I want to acknowledge the historic appropriations in the American Rescue Plan Act that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. The ANA funds will more than double the amount of support ANA can provide for Native languages in a typical year.

In almost every indigenous community, the number of Native language speakers has dwindled. Many surviving languages are at the point of critical endangerment. There are now over 200 tribal communities without living speakers of their mother tongue.

ANA currently supports 49 Native language preservation maintenance and EMI grants and five Native language community coordination pilot projects. In total, these awards support 27 federally recognized tribes and 22 Native organizations, and the preservation of 47 languages in 18 States.

ANA grantee evaluations show that teaching children traditional languages helps build intergenerational connections with fluent and proficient elders, and supports parents and children to deepen their bonds, by learning a common tongue that has been part of their families for generations prior to colonization.

Native language grantees and their beneficiaries repeatedly share that increased language uptake in the community deepens pride in their culture and renews their sense of hopefulness. Language and culture contribute to community cohesiveness and can contribute to the prevention factors that negatively impact health.

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on the elderly population who are the keys to cultural continuity. The susceptibility of elders to COVID-19 has also had a critical impact on our language grantees. Elders are indigenous communities' knowledge keepers and are integral to maintaining language vitality. Elders are often the only first language speakers, and sometimes the only speakers for many Naive languages. For example, the Kiowa Tribe in Oklahoma recently lost two of the tribes five fluent elder speaker mentors to COVID-19.

Prior to the pandemic, there were only 20 fluent Kiowa speakers out of a population of 12,000. Kiowa is a language islet, meaning no other tribe speaks this or a related language.

COVID-19 has also had a severe impact on ANA-funded projects. Tribal nations shut down government operations, including language revitalization programs. In the mist of the pandemic, communities have had to adapt and identify new approaches to programming. The first one, an early learning center which serves children 6 months to 36 months in Anchorage, Alaska, was able to post songs, read books and produce cultural videos in Yup'ik through YouTube.

Similarly, a Yuchi Tribe in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, operates the Yuchi House, a place for tribal members aged three months to 95 years to come together to begin the language and embrace the

Yuchi Way. They ceased in-person language instruction and transitioned to online teaching, using platforms to assess youth reading and writing that allowed students and elders to meet and learn language in real-time. However, the note remote learning is not as effective as in-person instruction and some elders are not able to use the online platform.

ANA appreciates this Committee's support for Native language programs. Our goal is to reach the most tribes and languages possible. In planning for American Rescue Plan emergency language awards, ANA had a tribal consultation, a community listening session, and conducted additional outreach to the Pacific. Participants wanted as much of the emergency funding as possible to be used for direct payments.

The announcement of the availability of emergency funds will be issued this week, and ANA will do additional outreach, particularly to tribes that have existing languages that have not previously received ANA funding.

Thank you for your commitment to supporting Native communities. I look forward to working with you to ensure the vitality of Native languages and cultures. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Sauve follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MICHELLE SAUVE, ACTING COMMISSIONER,
ADMINISTRATION FOR NATIVE AMERICANS, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN
SERVICES

Introduction

Chairman Schatz, Vice Chairman Murkowski, and Members of the Committee, it is my honor to testify before you today about the impact of COVID-19 on Native languages and cultures. I am Michelle Sauve, the Acting Commissioner for the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Native American Affairs, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). I am also a proud member of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe and a new student of my ancestral language, Kanien'keha.

As the Acting Commissioner, I oversee the implementation of the Native American Programs Act, including the Esther Martinez Immersion (EMI) and Native Language Preservation and Maintenance grant programs. ANA's language programs provide the largest federal support for Indigenous communities to ensure the survival of their languages. I have been involved in the ANA Native languages work for a decade and appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this hearing.

Overview of Native Languages and its Importance

I want to acknowledge the historic appropriations in the American Rescue Plan Act that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. These funds will more than double the amount of support ANA can provide for Native Languages in a typical year. American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities continue to face serious threats to their languages, with many factors contributing to this precarious position. In 2018, ANA testified at a hearing before this Committee examining efforts to maintain and revitalize Native Languages for future generations.¹ That testimony addressed federal policies designed to eliminate Native languages and communities, child and family policies that removed disproportionate numbers of children into non-Indigenous families, and assimilatory and abusive boarding schools that severely disrupted intergenerational language transmission.

¹ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg32539/html/CHRG-115shrg32539.htm>

There are now over 200 tribal communities without living speakers of their mother tongue.² In almost every Indigenous community, the number of Native language speakers has dwindled, and many surviving languages are at the point of critical endangerment. The Native American Languages Act of 1992 and the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act of 2006 both directed much-needed funding towards ANA's social and economic development efforts, which expanded them to include robust language revitalization programs.

ANA currently supports 49 Native Language Preservation and Maintenance and Esther Martinez Immersion grants and five Native Language Community Coordination pilot projects. In total, these awards support 27 federally recognized tribes and 22 Native organizations, and the preservation of 47 languages in 18 states, including Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, Montana, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

ANA grantee evaluations show that teaching children traditional languages helps build intergenerational connections with fluent and proficient Elders and supports parents and children to deepen their bonds by learning a common tongue that has been part of their families for generations prior to colonization. Native language grantees and their beneficiaries repeatedly share that increased language uptake in the community deepens pride in their culture and renews their sense of hopefulness. Language and culture contribute to community cohesiveness and can contribute to the prevention of factors that negatively impact health.

Through grantee impact assessments, ANA has learned that language projects require tremendous time, effort, and resource investments within communities that are already responding to many needs. ANA grants empower many of these communities to carry out critical language programs that provide intergenerational language learning and that connect Elders with youth, certify language teachers, document languages, awaken sleeping languages, and create new language learning resources.

Impact of COVID-19 on Native Peoples and Languages

A 2020 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study found that the age-adjusted COVID-19-associated mortality among American Indians and Alaska Natives was 1.8 times that of non-Hispanic Whites.³ We also know that COVID-19-associated mortality varied by geographic area and, in one state, for example, the mortality rate among American Indians and Alaska Natives was 3.8 times that of Whites.⁴ Inequities that existed prior to the pandemic put Indigenous people at higher risk, and the resources have been critical to addressing their disproportionate burden. Beyond access to quality health care, other determinants of health, such as healthy foods, stable housing, and education, culture matters greatly in addressing health inequities. Culture informs local issues and helps identify and frame problems, solutions, and how communities measure success.⁵ COVID-19 had a devastating effect on the elderly population who are the keys to cultural continuity.

The susceptibility of Elders to COVID-19 has also had a critical impact on language grantees. Elders are Indigenous communities' knowledge keepers and are integral to maintaining language vitality. Each Elder has invaluable cultural and linguistic knowledge that is essential in the continuing existence of language, culture, and traditions. Elders are often the only first-language speakers, and sometimes the only speakers, for many Native languages. For example, the Kiowa Tribe's Native Language Community Coordination program in Oklahoma recently lost two of the Tribe's five fluent Elder speaker-mentors to COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, there were only 20 fluent Kiowa speakers out of a population of 12,000. Kiowa is a language isolate, meaning no other Tribe speaks this or a related language.

COVID-19 has also had a severe impact on ANA-funded projects. In response to the pandemic, tribal nations shut down government operations, including language

² <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg32539/html/CHRG-115shrg32539.htm>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, December 11). COVID-19 Mortality Among American Indian and Alaska Native Persons—14 States, January–June 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6949a3.htm>.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, April 9). COVID-19 Incidence and Mortality Among American Indian/Alaska Native and White Persons—Montana, March 13–November 30, 2020. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7014a2.htm>.

⁵ Roundtable on the Promotion of Health Equity and the Elimination of Health Disparities; Board on Population Health and Public Health Practice; Institute of Medicine. *Leveraging Culture to Address Health Inequalities: Examples from Native Communities: Workshop Summary*. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2013 Dec 19. A, Culture as a Social Determinant of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK201298/>.

revitalization programs. Poor broadband infrastructure, physical distancing mandates, and tribal government funding shortfalls made normal functioning impossible. Communities that were able to continue operations experienced significant delays throughout the pandemic. These delays include an inability to provide in-person language instruction as required by EMI, cancellation or delay of key project objectives and activities such as language fairs and community outreach events, and of course, the serious health concerns preventing inter-generational language activities with Elders.

Challenges and Opportunities

In the midst of the pandemic, communities have had to adapt and identify new approaches to programming. ANA grantees have leveraged all available resources, including digital infrastructure to allow their efforts to persist, even if at a distance. For example, the Keres Children’s Learning Center, an EMI grantee in Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico, reported that not all language learners and Elders have access to the Internet, which caused delays for both youth and adult learners.

Another grantee, the Clare Swan Early Learning Center, which serves children 6 months to 36 months in Anchorage, Alaska, was able to post songs, read books, and produce cultural videos in Yup’ik through YouTube. These wonderful supplemental resources can continue to be used by families post-pandemic, but the best language learning, especially for children this young, must be in person.

Similarly, the Yuchi (also spelled Euchee) Tribe in Sapulpa, Oklahoma operates “The Yuchi House,” a place for Tribal members aged 3 months to 95 to come together to be in the language and embrace the Yuchi way. They ceased in-person language instruction and transitioned to online teaching utilizing platforms such as Kahoot and Zoom to assess youth reading and writing and allow students and elders to meet and learn language in real time. However, they note remote learning is not as effective as in-person instruction, and some Elders are not able to use the online platform. Yuchi is another language isolate.

These innovations underscore the ability of Indigenous communities to use the \$20 million in Emergency Native Language funding provided through the American Rescue Plan Act in adaptable and creative ways. ANA grantees have played a pivotal role—particularly during the pandemic—in recording, teaching, and preserving languages that could be lost altogether. ANA is hopeful that our language funding and support will continue these trends building stronger, more resilient communities in the wake of the pandemic.

Emergency Funding from the American Rescue Plan Act

ANA appreciates this Committee’s support for Native language programs, and our goal is to reach the most Tribes and languages possible. In planning for American Rescue Plan Act Emergency Language awards, ANA held a tribal consultation on March 26, a community listening session on March 29, and a special outreach session with the governments of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands on April 26.

Among other factors, the intent of the three ANA engagements with Native communities was to solicit feedback on allocation of the \$20 million appropriation. Most participants expressed a need to grow capacity for Native language programs, especially among tribes with smaller populations and resources, tribes or territories that have two or more languages, and tribes that lack dedicated and ongoing funding for language programs. Participants wanted as much of the emergency funds as possible to be used for direct payments and requested information on what has worked for previous language projects.

The announcement of the availability of emergency language funds has been released, and ANA is doing additional outreach, particularly to tribes that have existing languages but have not previously received ANA funding.

Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021

With respect to the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021 (S. 1402) introduced by Chairman Schatz and co-sponsored by Vice Chairman Murkowski, Mr. Feeling played a major role in Cherokee language usage by developing a Cherokee Language syllabary in word processing to complete computer documents in their own language. This remarkable accomplishment has led to other innovative ways American Indians and Alaska Natives have worked to preserve, maintain, and grow their own languages.

The bill builds on the memorandum of agreement established by ANA and the Departments of Education and the Interior to coordinate and support Native language work. ANA stands ready to provide technical assistance on the bill should it be requested.

Closing

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the impact COVID-19 has had on Native languages and cultures, and for your commitment to supporting Native communities. I look forward to working with you to ensure the vitality of Native languages and cultures. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Senator MURKOWSKI. [Presiding] Thank you, Ms. Sauve.

We now turn to the Honorable Chuck Hoskin, Jr. Mr. Hoskin?

**STATEMENT OF HON. CHUCK HOSKIN, JR., PRINCIPAL CHIEF,
CHEROKEE NATION**

Mr. HOSKIN. Mr. Chairman, Madam Vice Chairman, and distinguished members of the Committee, I thank you. Osiyo from the Cherokee Nation Reservation. I express my appreciation to testify on what I want you to know is one of my greatest responsibilities as Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation. It is in our oath of office that we will do all within our power to preserve the culture, heritage and traditions of the Cherokee Nation. That certainly includes our language.

Preserving our language is preserving our Cherokee identity, what makes us unique as a people. The heritage and traditions of our tribe are rooted in the language. Our language contains knowledge and ways of thinking that can never be fully captured in translation.

We have faced many foes and obstacle since European contact that have eroded our culture and have robbed us of our language. I am not talking today, though, about those historical obstacles, those historical foes. Certainly, war and removal and broken treaties, decades of assimilation, termination era Federal policies, did great injury to the Cherokee Nation and our language.

Today, our enemy is the passage of time and the fragility of human life. As I come before you today, the Cherokee Nation, a tribe of 392,000 citizens, we have about 2,000 Cherokee citizens anywhere who can speak Cherokee fluently. That is less than 1 percent of our population who can speak the language, who hold that in their hearts and in their minds. The average of these speakers is about 70. Experts estimate that we lose about 15 speakers a month as they pass away.

COVID-19 did particular damage to our effort to save the language. More than 50 fluent speakers died of COVID-19. Now, every life is irreplaceable; we have great sorry over every loss of life, particularly during COVID. But when you lose a speaker, you lose more than another tribal citizen, as great a loss as that is. You lose a national treasure.

So our great question today in the Cherokee Nation is, can we meet this moment with all of those challenges, the passage of time, the fragility of human life, and save our language? If we allow our language to perish, we are certainly proud of so many other accomplishments, from leading Indian Country on health care, from building a diverse business portfolio that fuels our growth in so many areas, provides economic security, we can look at our strides in education and housing, none of that will matter a great deal in generations if the Cherokee language is lost, because it will mean that we have lost something irreplaceable that is inextricably linked to our identity.

I signed our version of the Durbin Feeling Language Act in 2019. I proposed it when I took office. The Council of the Cherokee Nation approved it. We dedicated \$16 million to language preservation efforts. We are investing \$5 million of that into a new language center in Tahlequah named the Durbin Feeling Language Center. We are investing more in housing for fluent speakers next door. We are creating a language barracks, so that the young people that go to our immersion school, for example, can walk a short distance with their teachers over to some elders who live in a fluent speaking community, just steps away.

Our goal is to create a language campus, a language village, that will be our best tool in saving the Cherokee language. We will have dozens of programs in this facility, including our master apprentice program, where adults commit two years, they are paid, to learn the Cherokee language. It will also be a focal point of our other effort, which is to create opportunities for language speakers to earn a living, whether it is in the creative arts, whether it is in teaching, whether it is anywhere where there is a demand for the Cherokee language. That demand is growing the more we put resources into this effort.

Our efforts also harness technology. We partner with Microsoft, Apple, and Google, to make sure that our language is accessible to a new generation of young people who want to speak the language. We are very proud of the multi-million-dollar efforts that we have undertaken. We are very proud of the passion that our staff brings to it.

And I want you to know how proud we are of the United States Senate and the leadership of this Committee for considering the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act. Durbin Feeling was a great man. I knew Durbin Feeling. He was a patriot of the United States, serving the Country, and he was a savior of the Cherokee language. We do so much of this work in his name. He worked tirelessly. S. 1402 would build upon his work and extend his legacy for all of Indian Country.

I thank you for the opportunity to visit with you today. I would be glad to answer any questions when the time is appropriate.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hoskin follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CHUCK HOSKIN, JR., PRINCIPAL CHIEF, CHEROKEE NATION

Chairman Schatz, Vice Chairman Murkowski, and distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Osiyo. On behalf of Cherokee Nation and its 392,000 citizens, I thank you for this opportunity to testify on one of my greatest responsibilities—the protection, preservation, and revitalization of the Cherokee language. It is my honor to speak with you today. Through this testimony I will share some of the innovative ways we are working to preserve our language, speak to COVID-19's horrific impact on our Native speakers, and reiterate Cherokee Nation's strong support for both S. 1402, the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021, and S. 989, the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2021.

Preserving the Cherokee language is preserving Cherokee identity, as the heritage and traditions of the tribe are rooted in our language. Our language contains knowledge and ways of thinking that can never be fully captured in translation. Quite simply, the Cherokee language is the heart and soul of our tribe. The same is true for tribes throughout the United States. Accordingly, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that we have a right to use, revitalize

and transmit our languages to future generations. And, the UN General Assembly has declared 2022–2032 the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

Unfortunately, for many decades, the federal government actively suppressed the teaching and speaking of Native languages. Today, only about 2,000 people can speak Cherokee fluently. If we allow our language to perish, all our accomplishments—what we have done in health care, education, and economic development—will be for naught as these things can only be fully achieved when we save our language. Cherokees generations from now will be unimpressed by all we have done—frankly, they will be bewildered as to why the great Cherokee Nation failed to do what was necessary to save our language.

How Cherokee Nation is Working to Protect, Preserve, and Revitalize the Cherokee Language

My administration has made language preservation a top priority. This is not something we can fail at, and it is not something we can wait to do. The average age of a fluent speaker is 70, and our language experts estimate that we lose as many as 15 fluent speakers each month and we are losing as many as 23 per month during the height of the COVID–19 pandemic.

Within my first 100 days in office, I signed into law the *Durbin Feeling Cherokee Language Preservation Act*. This tribal law dedicated \$16 million to our language efforts, the largest investment in language in our tribe’s history. As part of this law, we are investing \$5 million in the construction and renovation of a new language center in Tahlequah. This center, named after the late Cherokee linguist Durbin Feeling, will house all our tribe’s language programs under one roof for the first time in our history. I am pleased to announce that we broke ground on this center last week.

This center will include our Cherokee Immersion School, a Pre-K through 8th grade education program aimed at training the next generation of Cherokee speakers. Our immersion school is in its 18th year and has added 64 fluent speakers to our rolls. Students follow the same state learning objectives as other students in public schools, but materials and content are converted into Cherokee and the curriculum is taught in Cherokee. At present, 98 students are enrolled in the program, but we had as many as 148 children enrolled before the pandemic.

The new facility will also house the Cherokee Language Master Apprentices Program. This program offers an opportunity for adult language learners to earn a stipend while being fully immersed in the Cherokee language. After completing the program, students will have 4,000 contact hours with the Cherokee language and will have spent more than 40 hours each week studying and speaking the language. We are partnering with area public schools, expanding our own staff and finding jobs for graduates in Cherokee language promotion and preservation.

Adjacent to the language center, we are building efficiency homes for Cherokee speakers, often elders, so that they will have safe, affordable places to live and provide opportunities for speakers to interact daily with our staff and young people. Our goal is to create and foster a Cherokee language village—a language campus where fluent speakers and students work side by side and live side by side.

Finally, the Durbin Feeling Cherokee Language Preservation Act also creates a cabinet level Secretary of Language, Culture and Community position in my administration, ensuring that our language and culture are always elevated to the highest levels of the Cherokee government.

The pairing of the immersion school, master apprentice program, and homes for speakers reflects a multigenerational effort to preserve and promote the Cherokee language for future generations and builds on our prior revitalization efforts. Cherokee Nation couples younger first language speakers with our oldest distinguished speakers to identify, learn and preserve these core foundational understandings. This group reviews our oldest written documents to glean at risk words to document, learn, perpetuate and create the standard for the next generation of distinguished speakers.

Innovative ways we’re working to protect/revitalize language through technology

The Cherokee Nation language revitalization programs are some of the most technologically advanced in Indian Country. The tribe has long standing partnerships with Microsoft, Apple, and Google that ensure the Cherokee language is compatible with all major digital platforms. Since 2016, every computer, smart phone, and tablet supports use of the Cherokee syllabary. The tribe is a liaison member of the Unicode Consortium which is the international standards body that governs how writing systems are displayed by computing systems. This helps the tribe keep our syllabary up to date with the latest technology.

These kinds of innovations opened doors for the Cherokee language to be used in any digital medium ranging from social media posts, text messaging, Google searches, interactive media, optical character recognition of syllabary, complex databases, and everything in between. The Cherokee Nation has created 3D computer animated cartoons in Cherokee language with Cherokee syllabary subtitles; an immersive 3D Cherokee language video game for Apple and Android devices; a virtual classroom platform for the Cherokee Immersion School which has the user interface completely in Cherokee syllabary; and a searchable Cherokee language word list that features audio recordings, just to name a few examples.

The tribe's leveraging of technology has fostered an environment of innovation for language revitalization. New advances will be forthcoming, including text to speech technology in Cherokee language and voice activation. A large-scale dynamic, cross referencing online Cherokee language database is being developed which will house historical Cherokee language documents as well as new materials the tribe collects. These kinds of advances will serve as valuable tools in Cherokee Nation's language revitalization efforts.

I am proud of the annual multimillion-dollar investments our Tribe makes to protect, preserve, and revitalize the Cherokee language, and I am happy to see Congress continue to acknowledge the need for additional federal investments in this area.

COVID-19's Impact on Cherokee Speakers

As we were making these historic investments in the Cherokee language, the most devastating pandemic in our lifetimes hit Cherokee Nation, and our Cherokee speakers were among the most vulnerable. During the worst of the pandemic, we made concentrated efforts to support our speakers, providing food assistance, telehealth services, support to pay the costs of utilities and direct elder assistance payments.

Despite these efforts, we lost more than 50 fluent speakers to COVID-19. Every life is irreplaceable, but when you lose a speaker, you are losing more than a person—you are losing a national treasure.

Knowing that we needed to protect this segment of our population, I prioritized Cherokee speakers for our first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. I ensured that our Cherokee speakers were eligible for the vaccine in Phase 1 of our distribution plan, right alongside our healthcare workers.

Their contributions to our tribe are immeasurable and their health and safety are one of our highest priorities. In 2019, we created a Cherokee Speaker Roll to begin identifying Cherokee speakers and showing our appreciation to them. Little did I know at the time, this roll would be invaluable to us when distributing the COVID-19 vaccine.

Cherokee Nation Strongly Supports the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act

I thank you for introducing S. 1402, the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act, which carries the name of a great Cherokee citizen—Durbin Feeling. I say without equivocation that my friend Durbin was the largest contributor to the Cherokee language since Sequoyah, the inventor of the Cherokee syllabary. Durbin dedicated his life to saving and preserving the Cherokee language for future generations. He spent decades breathing new life into the language. He was a tireless advocate for Native language and revitalization efforts.

His generosity to the Cherokee people and his unwavering commitment to Cherokee language perpetuation will be the foundation upon which we teach future generations to honor and carry on our traditions. This bill speaks to everything he stood for and will build upon his many years of work.

The Durbin Feeling Native Languages Act will ensure that the federal government is upholding its promises and the carrying out the policies designed to support native languages. The nationwide survey it produces will help guide investments in native language and ensure that all native languages remain vital for generations to come. It is an important bill, and I urge each member of the Committee to commit to getting this legislation to the President's desk this Congress.

We are going to save the Cherokee language. We can, we must and we will. We are going to do it not just because of what Durbin Feeling did, but because of the vision that he had. I pledge to you today that we will carry out Durbin's vision but I need your help.

I hope that my grandchildren and future generations grow up in a United States where native languages are valued, revered and given the full respect they deserve.

I thank you for your support of Native languages and the opportunity to speak with you today.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Hoskin. We appreciate that.

We will next turn to Ms. Leslie Harper.

STATEMENT OF LESLIE HARPER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL COALITION OF NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Ms. HARPER. Aaniin, Committee Chair Schatz, Vice-Chair Murkowski, and members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Miigwech for this opportunity to testify today.

My name is Leslie Harper, and I am an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. I live on our reservation homeland which is in north central Minnesota.

I am president of the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs. Our coalition is a volunteer group that advocates for the use of Native American languages as the primary language of instruction, which means we educate students through a Native American language for all subjects.

Our coalition partners operate in a wide variety of contexts. There are BIA schools or programs, there are State public schools, charter schools, private non-profit schools. Coalition partners operate, depending on their capacity, a different range of programs. There is infant or childcare, there are preschool programs, elementary schools, secondary schools and some tertiary education. These schools and programs currently operate in 18 States and U.S. territories.

So there are hundreds of Native American languages across the Country with multiple, unique linguistic and cultural principles that still exist. Despite all of these efforts to wipe us out, we are still here. And there are unique legal and political responsibilities to our Native American language-speaking and learning communities.

Committee members, about a month ago, on April 28th, you received testimony on COVID-19's effects on Native education. Our colleague Dr. Kauano'e Kamana described relevant issues affecting Native language medium schools on that day. We agree with and support all that Dr. Kamana provided on that day. That is very representative of the Native American language schools and programs that are operating across the Country. We have been disrupted from our language delivery and our learning spaces this year due to COVID-19. With great grief, yes, I report that many more of our Master speakers of our Native American languages have passed away this year. I don't have an official count, though every language revitalizer in my network can name speakers who have been lost this year.

The COVID-19 crises of this year in lost connections and lost lives show us how critically we must address a wide range of language revitalization strategies.

So when we write the story of Native American languages in the United States, we envision a healthy future. We dream up the time and the ability to examine multiple ways to revitalize our languages, to build capacity in new speakers, in new teachers, new learning modes, new curricula at all levels, birth through elderly, to determine how and where our languages intersect with English

and other world languages, to ensure that protections for Native American language communities will ensure.

Wellness measures that will include language vitality in all areas, economy, recreation, ceremonial communities, infrastructure, energy, jobs, environmental issues. Native American language understandings can contribute to healthy futures of all these areas of citizenship for the United States when we have the supports to grow and do so.

Congress has funded multiple language resource centers at various universities that serve to improve the Nation's capacity for teaching and learning foreign languages. But Native American languages have been overlooked. So this sort of an invisibility of the unique legal and political rights of the original languages of the United States of America leaves a gap in access, and this is a place where we see opportunity for Congress to fulfil that responsibility to Native American language communities as intended in the Native American Languages Act of 1990 as well.

So we wholeheartedly support the Native American Languages Resource Center Act. We also support the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act, because that can provide even more representation of our unique linguistic and cultural efforts and our sorely overlooked efforts.

Miigwech, miigwech, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions and I will also be able to provide any written follow-up as needed.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Harper follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LESLIE HARPER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL COALITION OF
NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Aaniin Committee Chair Schatz, Vice-Chair Murkowski, and Members of Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Miigwech for the opportunity to testify before you.

My name is Leslie Harper, and I am an enrolled member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. I live on our reservation homeland which is in north central Minnesota. I have worked in grassroots Native American Language revitalization in community-based adult language learning projects, and co-founded and served as Director and taught at all elementary grade levels at our Niigaane Ojibwemowin Immersion school at Leech Lake. I currently provide consultation to Tribes and organizations to support community development and evaluations in Native language communities. I am President of the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs. Our Coalition is a volunteer group that advocates for the use of Native American Languages as the primary medium of instruction, which means that a Native American Language is spoken and treated as the language of communication for all operations and all subjects. The National Coalition brings together schools and programs that use Indigenous languages as the medium of instruction under the provisions of the U.S. federal Native American Languages Act of 1990 (NALA). Native language medium schools and programs (sometimes called immersion or dual language programs) educate students through a Native American language.

National Coalition advocates come from a wide variety of jurisdictions, including Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, state public schools, charter schools, and private non-profit schools. National Coalition advocates range from infant care, pre-school programs, elementary schools, secondary schools to tertiary education. These schools and programs are currently enacted in eighteen states and U.S. territories.

In this context in the United States, there are unique linguistic and cultural principles we work within to revitalize languages. Along with this, there are unique legal policy principles and unique legal responsibilities to our Native American Language-speaking and learning communities. Native American Language revitalization acts in many places in our communities. While many choose an education setting

to implement, we find that Native American Languages are an important intervention across many areas of our community vitality.

Committee members, you received testimony on April 28th, 2021 on Covid-19 effects on Native education. Our colleague Dr. Kauano'e Kamana described relevant issues affecting Native language medium schools, and I will refer you to her testimony and agree with all that Dr. Kamana provided in that setting.

We have been disrupted from our language delivery and our learning spaces this year due to Covid-19. Some have pivoted and learned ways to do our best—some have successfully pivoted to online and distance learning, learned new technology to share space and time to speak our languages together. Native American language revitalizers are visionary and are innovators who often propose an alternative way to live our lives in our languages.

With great grief, I report that many more of our Master speakers of our Native American languages have passed away this year. I do not have an official count. Though every language revitalizer in my network can anecdotally name speakers who have been lost this year. In a time of dwindling numbers of Elder First Speakers of our languages, Native American language revitalizers are working as always, against a clock, to prepare new speakers of our languages for multi-generational, healthy, living language speaking communities. The covid-19 crises of this year in lost connections and lost lives show us how critically we must regard a wide range of language revitalization strategies.

This year has shown us how critically low our stock of speakers is, and how deeply we work to build new speakers. Native American language revitalizers have, from necessity, dedicated even more time to research, dream, build, test, reinvigorate, reenergize, and value our languages. We have been disrupted again in transmitting our languages even with the best-laid plans. While our programs and schools have not been able to provide consistent in-person language support, many language revitalization plans went into 'life-support' mode to continue to share language with our students and families of students.

Successful exemplary programs develop and create language speakers across all ages and generations as resources. Language programs create new child-age speakers of our languages to normalize language transmission in our lands, and we also focus on creating new adult speakers of our languages who can teach, design, and support language learning programs. There are revitalization programs to help grandparent-age generation passive speakers to re-awaken language that may have been forcibly removed from them at a young age. Adult language learners share in the work to create relevant language plans, to write proposals, to evaluate our actions, to survey community members, and to maintain our sustaining rituals that keep us going. It is imperative that we articulate for ourselves and seek critical, relevant, intentional support to pick up our work to keep moving forward.

When we consider the story of Native American Languages in the United States, we envision a healthy future: all generations in all spaces speaking our languages together. We dream of creating that with fully supported research and development spaces, and the time and ability to examine multiple spaces needed to revitalize our languages. We build capacity in new speakers, new learning modes, new curricula at all levels birth through elderly, determining value measures in multiple spaces, territories, land contexts. We will determine value and intersection with other world languages. Policy protections for Native American Language communities will be ensured. Health and wellness measures will include language vitality in all areas of economy, recreation, ceremonial communities, infrastructure, energy, and environment. These are all spaces in which our languages deserve to live. Native American Language revitalization can affect the healthy futures of all these areas of citizenship in the United States—when we have the supports to grow and do so.

A Native American language resource center that studies and broadens those realities will help to fulfil unique sovereign, self-determining, locally understood ways to live our lives, honor our pasts, and brighten our futures.

This is already offered to World languages in multiple centers—Congress has funded sixteen Language Resource Centers at various universities to establish, strengthen, and operate centers that serve as resources for improving the nation's capacity for teaching and learning foreign languages through teacher training, research, materials development, and dissemination projects. However, Native American Languages have been overlooked. The invisibility of the unique legal and political rights of the original languages of the United States of America leaves a gap in the opportunity to fulfil Congress's support for all languages in our country.

There are about 175 Native American Languages with some speakers today and an estimated 300 prior to the European invasion of North America. The Federal Foreign Service reports that it takes 1,100 hours of study to develop professional level proficiency in a language with major linguistic and cultural differences from

English. Native American languages meet this criterion, and probably exceed it due to limited teaching resources. Federally funded language resource centers are providing the teachers and support for world language immersion and dual language programs. Those programs are spreading nationally in pre-school through high school level programs for World languages and Native American languages are being left behind. We do not yet have an opportunity to do what the national Language Resource Centers are doing for foreign languages. Designing Native American Language Resource Centers as partnerships between skilled local practitioners, universities, and Tribal Colleges will bring resources together to support language revitalization in the intensive work that is sorely needed.

The majority of Native American students in the United States attend public schools and non-Tribal universities. World language resource centers are supporting the study of world languages in the schools that these Native American students attend. We encourage equitable access to the opportunity to study Native American languages. Tribal Colleges and Bureau of Indian Education Schools should have a national resource center to help build capacity to learn and design exemplary practices in the teaching of their languages. In the same way that world languages often have the support of foreign countries to teach their languages, we would like to see capacity built for Native American language expert practitioners here to support teaching of Native American languages.

Native American language communities also have limited access to data-gathering design, analysis, and results. Native language medium schools or program populations are often left out of large-scale studies on Native learners, due to small size in unique interventions. It is important that we recognize and honor the place that Native American languages hold in the vitality of our futures in this country. Timely, relevant data regarding the number of Native American language speakers, our unique community contexts, and capacity needs will provide support to justify increasing the resources available to Native American languages.

“Indapiizikaa gosha,” some of our Elders would have said in the past when they were alive, which translates to, “I’m doing the best I can with what I have”. This saying, from an Ojibwe perspective, can mean that I am acting to honor my personal role in the community to the best of my ability. Historically however, in many of our negotiation spaces, translations may have been imperfect or biased. At times, this phrase may have been misunderstood or mis-applied to justify a scarcity of resources or to avoid addressing barriers in a meaningful way. We must continue to work together with you and all the other members of Congress to ensure that NAL revitalization work is mutually understood and honored.

Miigwech for this opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions and can provide written information as follow up as needed.

The CHAIRMAN. [Presiding] Thank you very much.

Next, we have Ms. Ka’iulani Laehā, Chief Executive Officer of ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. Welcome, aloha.

STATEMENT OF KA’IULANI LAEHĀ, CEO, ‘AHA PŪNANA LEO

Ms. LAEHĀ. Aloha kakou, aloha Committee Chair Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski and members of the Committee. Mahalo nui, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo today.

I am Ka’iulani Laehā, the Chief Executive Officer of ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the revitalization of the Hawaiian language. We are also the longest-standing indigenous language medium language nest program in the United States.

Over the last four decades, the tireless efforts of advocates and educators has led to a resurgence of ‘Olelo Hawai‘i, the Native Hawaiian language. It has also allowed us the opportunity to encounter and overcome challenges that other Native language communities will face along their journey of language revitalization. I believe that both S. 989 and S. 1402 are crucial steps and vital to the progress of Native American language normalization.

I am going to focus on S. 989. The establishment of a Native American Language Resource Center would significantly bolster our efforts. We have been working with Senator Schatz and seeking the establishment of a center like this for many years.

The foreign language centers were established in 1990 under the U.S. Department of Education to provide equitable resources to foreign language communities. However, the Native American language communities, which are among the most endangered of world languages and from communities that are in need of the support, have yet to see this sort of benefit.

The Native American Languages resource center is overdue for our Native American language communities, and is needed to bring about equitable outcomes today and for the future. In 2020, we virtually celebrated the 30th anniversary of the passage of the Native American Languages Act, or NALA. While it was a celebration, NALA will only be possible if Congress mandates specific policies and efforts to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of NALA.

Historically, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo has worked with an informal network of similar grassroots organizations with limited resources across the Nation. With the Center, we can better support each other, other educational institutions, media groups, and small businesses focused on language revitalization by sharing about our experiences. The Center will be a place of accessible resources for all Native American language communities, no matter where they are located, no matter what stage they are at in their language revitalization efforts.

This resource center is an opportunity to formally develop consortia with our American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian serving institutions that are working and supporting school and community-based efforts. In a typical year, we host over 100 visitors here in Hawaii, seeking support and assistance and guidance on establishing language programs. A resource center could provide a coordinated support center to help develop programs based on best practices that will also align with the needs of each Native American language community.

There is also a shortage of researchers that forced small grassroots organizations to rely upon their own teachers to develop learning resources, create appropriate learning methodology, and advocate for themselves. The center would allow for shared research and collaboration to support the development of the teacher workforce and learning methodology, and could also help to ensure that Federal plans, such as the American Families Plan that currently suggests universal preschools for all three- and four-year-olds protects and aligns with our current objectives and does not cause unintended consequences for our Native languages.

We know that Native American language programs cannot succeed in a one size fits all type of system. Our Native American language organizations need and deserve the full support of a language resource center to be included in the American Families Plan to ensure that our programs have support that is aligned with the real needs of the communities that we serve.

Mahalo nui for this opportunity to provide testimony today. I am happy to answer any additional questions you may have. Mahalo.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Laehā follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF KA'ULANI LAEHĀ, CEO, 'AHA PŪNANA LEO

Aloha Committee Chair Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski and members of the Committee. Mahalo nui, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo on S. 989, a bill to establish a Native American Language Resource Center and S. 1402, Durbin Feeling, a bill to amend the Native American Languages Act to ensure the survival and continuing vitality of Native American Languages.

I am Ka'ulani Laehā, the Chief Executive Officer of the 'Aha Pūnana Leo, a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization dedicated to the revitalization of the Hawaiian language and the longest standing indigenous language medium language nest program in the United States. E ola ka 'olelo Hawai'i, the Hawaiian language shall live is the vision that drives our work.

Over the last 4 decades, the tireless efforts of advocates and educators has led to a resurgence of 'Olelo Hawai'i, the Native Hawaiian language. It has also allowed us the opportunity to encounter and overcome challenges that other native language communities will face along the long journey of language revitalization. I believe that both S.989 and S.1402 are crucial steps and vital to the progress of Native American language normalization.

S.1402 requires more effective coordination between federal entities that will minimize the current interdepartmental disconnect and lack of understanding of what is needed in the communities doing the work. This bill requires increased reporting to understand areas of importance to support our efforts and will better evidence and communicate the progress or shortcomings of the programs in place.

S. 989 the establishment of a Native American Language Resource Center would significantly bolster our efforts by encouraging Native American languages as medium of instruction, stimulating broader adoption of Native American languages across our national education system, and improving educator support for Native American language instruction. We have been working with Senator Schatz and seeking the establishment of a center like this for many years.

Foreign language centers were established in 1990 under the US Department of Education to provide equitable resources to foreign language communities; Native American language communities, among the most endangered of world languages and from communities that are in need of the support, have yet to see this sort of benefit. In regard to Native American languages, there is little understanding of the range of needs in teaching and learning. While being able to fulfill high school or college level general education language requirements with a Native American language is a major step in the right direction, further opportunities to support the learning of Native American languages are needed for revitalization efforts to continue and reach their full potential. The Native American Language Resource Center is overdue for our Native American languages and is needed to bring about equitable outcomes today and in the future.

On October 30, 2020, together with the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Program, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo held a 30th anniversary virtual celebration on the passage of the Native American Languages Act (NALA). It was a celebration indeed, however, the goals of NALA will only be possible if the Congress mandates specific policies and efforts to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of NALA. S. 989, the Native Language Resource Center Act will provide a national center, accessible to all, and valuable to Native American language programs and schools at all levels. The importance of the establishment of a Native American Language Resource center could not come at a more crucial time, first, with Native American schools and programs being so heavily impacted by Covid-19, and as our Native communities have lost many family members, elders, traditional leaders and some of the only remaining speakers of their Native American language. And second, as President Biden announces the American Families Plan to include support for universal preschool, the Congress must understand the distinct needs of Native communities with early childhood programs taught in the medium of a Native language. The federal agencies that have jurisdiction over implementation of programs like preschools must eliminate barriers Native American language communities face and support administrative rules that are aligned to NALA. I note in particular that Hawai'i state law in alignment with NALA Section 104 (2) is what has allowed our Hawaiian language nest preschools to develop to our current level of national leadership using staff whose qualifications other than those involving health and safety and proficiency in our Indigenous language are left to us based on our own understandings of best practice from our own cultural

understandings. Early Childhood Development through a Native American language requires the highest fluency for teachers to transmit the language to the children. Quality programming in a Native American language ensures a safe and healthy robust Native American language environment based in the traditions of the languages and peoples themselves. These are the standards for such quality programming and it is the responsibility of those providing the language nest environment to ensure the success of its program. A Native American Language Resource Center is needed to support school and community based Native American language revitalization efforts across the nation.

Historically, the 'Aha Pūnana Leo has worked with an informal network of similar grassroots organizations with limited resources across the nation. Because of our long history we have come upon many challenges that we have overcome or are working through to ensure a living Hawaiian language and with a Center we can better support other educational institutions, media groups, and small businesses focused on language revitalization by addressing and sharing about our experiences. The Center would be a place of accessible resources for all Native American language communities no matter where they are located and no matter what stage they are at in their language revitalization efforts.

The Native American Language Resource center is an opportunity to formally develop consortia with our American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian serving institutions that are working and supporting school and community-based revitalization efforts. There are a range of needs for Native American language communities that have not been met. As an example, in a typical year we host over a hundred visitors seeking support, assistance, and guidance on establishing flourishing Native American language programs. A resource center could provide a coordinated support center to help develop programs based on best practices that will align with the needs of each Native American language community. Another example is the shortage of researchers that force small grassroots organizations to rely upon their own teachers to develop learning resources, create appropriate methodology and advocate for themselves. The Native American Language Resource Center would allow for shared research and collaboration to support the development of the teacher workforce and learning methodology and also help to ensure that federal plans, such as the American Families Plan that currently suggests universal preschool for all 3 and 4-year-olds, protects and aligns with our current objectives and does not cause unintended consequences for our Native languages. We know that Native American language programs cannot succeed in a one-size-fits-all type of system.

The key findings in America's Languages Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century report by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on Language Learning are:

- “the ability to understand, speak, read, and write in world languages in addition to English is critical to success in business, research, and international relations in the 21st century.”
- “the study of a second language has been linked to improved learning outcomes in other subjects, enhanced cognitive ability, and the development of empathy and effective interpretive skills.”
- “the use of a second language has been linked to a delay in certain manifestations of aging.”

The 'Aha Pūnana Leo has witnessed these outcomes in our graduates that have completed the Hawaiian medium pathway of education that is focused first on exclusive use of Hawaiian language in the early years and subsequent transferred skills to English graduating high school fully bilingual in Hawaiian and English. These findings are very positive in support of language learning however for our American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian languages the additional and most critical benefits are in the relationships of language to spirituality, genealogy, culture and identity. These are described in Kumu Honua Mauli Ola or a Native Hawaiian educational philosophy similar to other Native American language communities' ways of knowing and well-being. The Commission on Language Learning recognized Native American languages as distinct in political status and history and recommended targeted and increased support where our languages are being used as primary languages of education and for the development of curricula and education materials. The Native American Resource Center directly addresses the recommendation of the Commission and could further support our Native language learners in developing high fluency in English or other languages.

As we examine our COVID-19 Response a year later, the pandemic has brought to light the inequities that exist in Native American language support; the lack of learning resources available to families digitally or for home use, access to in person

care programs for our children, and the need to increase staff with high levels of fluency that are needed to meet the standard of care to maintain healthy and safe settings in our childcare centers. The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo operates language nests on five major islands, Hawai‘i, Maui, Moloka‘i, O‘ahu and Kaua‘i. Our graduates (and families) matriculate to Hawai‘i’s public Hawaiian language medium Charter and Department of Education schools. The ‘Aha Pūnana Leo together with our consortium partners, Ke Kula ‘o Nawahiokalani‘opu‘u (Nawahi) and Ka Haka ‘Ula o Ke‘elikolani, Hawaiian language college, P-20 model demonstrates successful private-public partnership and best practices in language revitalization.

We have witnessed many positive outcomes including our graduates raising their own children in Hawaiian language, the key findings described in the 2017 Commission on Language Learning report and the exciting recent United Nations declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032. Our Native American language organizations need and deserve the full support of a Language Resource Center included in the American Families Plan to ensure that our programs have support that is aligned with the real needs of the communities we serve.

Mahalo nui for this opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any additional questions you may have. Mahalo nui.

The CHAIRMAN. Mahalo. Thank you very much.

Next, we have Ms. Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle, Director of the Kawerak Eskimo Heritage, Chair, Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, in Nome, Alaska.

**STATEMENT OF BERNADETTE “YAAYUK” ALVANNA-STIMPFLE,
DIRECTOR, KAWERAK ESKIMO HERITAGE; CHAIR, ALASKA
NATIVE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION AND ADVISORY
COUNCIL**

Ms. ALVANNA-STIMPFLE. [Phrase in Native tongue] honorable Senators, and mahalo, Chair Brian Schatz, and Quyanaq, Iliganamiik Vice Chair Lisa Murkowski.

My name is Yaayuk [phrase in Native tongue] Bernadette Alvanna-Stimpfle [phrase in Native tongue] in English, and I represent myself here today, speaking in favor of the Native American Language Resource Center Act and the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021.

I am speaking to you in the second language that I learned as a five-year old. Inupiaq is my first language.

I am hopeful that increased budget allocations can be made towards Alaska Native languages, and more attention can be given to small tribes who do not have the capacity to write and manage complex Federal grants. I teach the Inupiaq language and am mentor to the first-ever Inupiaq immersion class in Nome, at Nome Port schools. My daughter happens to be the first Inupiaq immersion teacher.

I want to share with you that we have struggled with maintaining our classes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly every Alaska Native language has fewer speakers now than when the pandemic led us to a nationwide shutdown over a year ago. The need to protect our elders, communities, and selves meant that we had to try to switch to online classes and meetings. This was difficult because of the limited bandwidth in rural Alaska, and high cost of internet access in our communities. In addition, many of our teachers were not familiar with online teaching and how that changes our abilities to communicate, teach, learn, and grow together.

Alaska is home to 23 Alaska Native languages. I am the chair of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council,

and we have received testimony about the challenges Alaska Native languages face today. Of those 23 languages, 2 are no longer actively spoken. Seventeen of them have fewer than 100 remaining speakers. The State of Alaska declared a linguistic emergency in 2018, but it has done nothing to improve matters at the State level since that time.

In fact, budget cuts at the University of Alaska and the neglect to listen to the recommendations of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council have left us worse off than when the emergency was declared.

I will share with you what we need to make changes. We need some substantial shifts in Alaska. Overall, we need to focus on indigenous language teacher preparation, materials development, language normalization, and reforming education to be inclusive of Alaska Native languages. The Alaska Native Studies Council is working with colleagues in Hawaii and New Zealand to develop a proposal for the College of Alaska Native Languages. This college would be housed within the University of Alaska. That would allow us to develop Alaska Native language teacher certification and the licensure processes to increase activity in language documentation and access. This idea needs Federal support and the University of Alaska and State of Alaska need to assist and collaborate with the development of the college.

In addition, if the University of Alaska received funding dedicated to open access, we can develop zero credit online options for existing courses, so Alaskan people do not have to pay tuition to learn their own endangered languages. This would provide healing opportunities because it only adds to the trauma to charge someone to learn their own language which was denied to them and their ancestors due to State and Federal governmental actions and policies.

The Alaska Native Language Center needs to be transformed into an Alaska Native Language Media Network that produces multimedia content and creates access to Alaska Native language materials. We have Alaska Native artists, writers, animators, filmmakers, and journalists, which can help make sure that Alaska Native languages are heard, seen, and felt all across Alaska. This would also need funding and advocacy to bring the idea into being.

We need your help. Alaska was already in a crisis 30 years ago with Alaska Native languages, and now the majority of our languages are on the verge of being lost. It is so hard to reverse language shift, and our efforts are often pulled into political battles that have nothing to do with the love we have for our languages, and the ways we need them to heal us.

I don't know what the future holds, but I hope that it is brighter than today, and I am hopeful that you will be the ones who will take the bold steps that are needed to bring us to a destiny other than loss and sorrow.

Quyanaq, thank you, honorable Senators, for your time. I am available for questions should you have any.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Alvanna-Stimpfle follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF BERNADETTE “YAAYUK” ALVANNA-STIMPFLE, DIRECTOR,
KAWERAK ESKIMO HERITAGE; CHAIR, ALASKA NATIVE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION
AND ADVISORY COUNCIL

Thank you honorable Senators, and Mahalo Chair Brian Schatz, and Quyanaq, Iliganamiik vice Chair Lisa Murkowski. My name is Yaayuk Bernadette Alvanna Stimpfle, and I represent myself here today, speaking in favor of the Native American Language Resource Center Act and the Durbin Feeling Native American Languages Act of 2021. I am hopeful that increased budget allocations can be made towards Alaska Native languages, and more attention can be given to small Tribes who do not have the capacity to write and manage complex federal grants.

I teach the Inupiaq language and want to share with you that we have struggled with maintaining our classes throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly every Alaska Native language has fewer speakers now than when the pandemic led us to a nationwide shutdown over a year ago. The need to protect our elders, communities, and selves meant we had to try to switch to online classes and meetings. This was difficult because of the limited bandwidth in rural Alaska, and high cost of Internet access in our communities. In addition, many of our teachers were not familiar with online teaching and how that changes our abilities to communicate, teach, learn, and grow together.

Alaska is home to 23 Alaska Native languages. I am the chair of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council, and we have received testimony about the challenges Alaska Native languages face today. Of those 23 languages, two are no longer actively spoken today, 17 of them have fewer than 100 remaining speakers. The State of Alaska declared a linguistic emergency in 2018, but has done nothing to improve matters at the state level since that time. In fact, budget cuts at the University of Alaska and the neglectedness to listen to the recommendations of the Alaska Native Language Preservation and Advisory Council have left us worse off than when the emergency was declared.

If we are going to create changes, we need a number of substantial shifts in Alaska. Overall, we need to focus on Indigenous language teacher preparation, materials development, language normalization, and reforming education to be inclusive of Alaska Native languages.

The Alaska Native Studies Council has been working with colleagues in Hawai'i and New Zealand to develop a proposal for the College of Alaska Native Languages. This college would be housed within the University of Alaska that would allow us to develop Alaska Native language teacher certification, and licensure processes to increase activity in language documentation and access. This idea needs federal support and the University of Alaska and State of Alaska need to assist and collaborate with the development of the college.

In addition, if the University of Alaska received funding dedicated to open access, we could develop zero credit online options for existing courses so Alaskan people do not have to pay tuition to learn their own endangered languages. This would open doors to provide healing opportunities. It only adds to the trauma to charge someone to learn their own language, which was denied to them and their ancestors due to state and federal governmental actions and policies.

The Alaska Native Language Center needs to be bolstered and be transformed into an Alaska Native Language Media Network that produces multimedia content and creates access to Alaska native language materials. We have Alaska Native artists, writers, animators, filmmakers, and journalists, and we can help make sure that Alaska Native languages are heard, seen, and felt all across Alaska. This would also need funding and advocacy to bring the idea into being.

Alaska Native Place names need to be restored, because thousands of colonial names have come over our land and threaten to eliminate Indigenous place names and alienate people from their ancestral lands. Just imagine if Alaska embraced its Indigenous history by restoring the names on the land and reversed a damaging process of putting the names of colonizers and explorers on lands that already had names there had thousands of years of history behind them.

We need your help. Alaska was already in a crisis thirty years ago with Alaska Native languages, and now the majority of our languages are on the verge of being lost. It is so hard to reverse language shift, and our efforts are often pulled into political battles that have nothing to do with the love we have for our languages, and the ways we need them and the ways that they heal us. I don't know what the future holds, but I hope that it is brighter than today, and I am hopeful that you will be the ones who will take the bold steps that are needed to bring us to a destiny other than loss and sorrow. Thank you, honorable Senators, for your time. I am available for questions should you have any.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much for your testimony.

My first question is for Ms. Laehā. When we spoke earlier this month about Native Hawaiian education, you described the uniqueness of Native Hawaiian immersion early childhood programs. I am wondering if you can share some of the challenges that these programs can face with the one size fits all Federal early childhood mold.

Ms. LAEHĀ. Absolutely, thank you for that question.

One example that comes to mind is that while we have NALA that protects and promotes the use of Native American languages, we need to pay really close attention to these new plans that could create barriers for language nests, such as what the definition of quality would mean. Within mainstream early childcare settings the definition of quality is typically tied to an accreditation given by a mainstream accreditor with focus on English language medium schools, rather than on accreditors that are aligned with quality indigenous programs, teaching through indigenous languages with focus on revitalizing those languages.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Can you give us some specific, it doesn't have to be right now, actually, it can be for the record, but if you have any specific recommendations as we think about Federal efforts to support universal early childhood education, so that they can also support Native language medium programs. Do you have any specific suggestions about how to configure a program like that?

Ms. LAEHĀ. I do, and I think that assuring that NALA Sections 104(2) and (3) are followed is very important, making sure that these Native American language medium programs have a distinct category of early childhood support. Also making sure that the qualifications of staff solely focus on the proficiency in Native American language and the culture of instruction with best practices in language revitalization-based measurements of quality.

I think there is also significant need for targeted and regular funding for the existing and future early childhood education Native American English programs through government entities such as OHA, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, tribal governments, and Alaska Native entities that should further be enhanced by competitive grants through the Administration of Native Americans or other entities that might strengthen these programs.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Sauve, how many qualified Native language grant applications is ANA unable to service just because of a lack of funding?

Ms. SAUVE. Thank you, Chairman Schatz, for that question.

ANA receives between 60 and 75 applications each year for both of our competitions. This year, we were only able to fund 11 of them out of the 75 that applied. That trend is pretty similar in previous years as well.

So there is definitely a great unmet need out there. That is not even counting those that don't apply because they are worried they won't score high enough in the competition.

The CHAIRMAN. That is one measure, is the number of applicants. Do you have a sense for what that dollar amount would be in terms of an unmet need?

Ms. SAUVE. Yes. The dollar amount, I can get that to you.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, why don't you take that for the record. Obviously, the number of applicants is one question, the number of dollars it would cost to meet all the unmet need is another one. Thank you very much.

Ms. Laehā, I want to talk to you about best practices. This is something that I learned a lot about with my great staff over the last seven or eight years, that a lot of what happened in Nawahi, with 'Aha Pūnana Leo, and with a lot of the programs in the state of Hawaii, they were really navigating new waters and trying to figure out how to maintain quality education in the context of immersion, and then try to figure out how to comply with Federal testing requirements and all the rest of it.

I think we figured this out. Obviously, it is going to be a continuing learning process.

But I am just wondering if you can speak a little bit to the value of sharing best practices. Because it is hard enough to get this stuff right. But if every single Native organization, Native community, has to figure this out anew, not having learned any lessons from any other Native community that may be two or three or five years ahead, that seems like a waste of resources, especially for the kinds of difficulties that the small tribes in Alaska are experiencing, where you are talking about 20 people still speaking the language.

They don't have the resources to develop infrastructure around Native language immersion, let alone how to integrate that into a Federal testing regime and making sure these kids are career and college ready in whatever way that makes sense.

I am wondering if you can speak to the value of identifying best practices and then sharing them across a broader platform.

Ms. LAEHĀ. Absolutely. We recognize and we know that each community is unique, and they are going to encounter equally unique challenges. I think the fact that we have hosted hundreds of visitors over the year and have had hundreds of inquiries to see and learn about the program and what we have experienced really speaks for itself.

It is really evidence that best practices shared amongst communities is what is needed. It is much more than an assumption at this point that collaborating and sharing those best practices between the communities is really vital to success.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Vice Chair Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To your point that you just made about tribes that have limited resources, I recall it wasn't too many years back, but there was a fire at the language immersion school in Bethel for the early learners. As tragic as the fire was to the building and the fact that the kids no longer had a space, but it was the loss of the reading cards, the materials that had been made by the teachers. You are not ordering them from some book company. They had been made and we lost all of that.

So when you think about, I think about resources, some of it is really pretty basic.

Ms. Alvanna-Stimpfle, it is good to have you before the Committee. I thank you for your extraordinary leadership when it comes to language preservation. The Alaska Native Language Pres-

ervation and Advisory Council provides an index of the various local language programming that is offered by the schools, non-profits, other heritage centers. These are detailed maps that are able to highlight the various geographic areas within the State that are covered by the local tribal and State outreaches. It is a pretty useful tool, again, given limited resources that are available.

With the Durbin Feeling Native American Language Act, it would require survey of Federal programs that support Native language, theoretically to help inform Federal decision makers about what the resources are, if the Federal agencies are living up to their responsibility to preserve and support preservation and revitalization of Native languages.

How do you think this helps us? Would having access to information about these Federal Native language resources help to inform the collection and programming for the work that is done within the Preservation and Advisory Council? Is this helpful from a national perspective, or do we need it to be more organically driven?

Ms. ALVANNA-STIMPFLÉ. Well, I am very proud of our young people that have worked tirelessly in trying to revive our language with elders as our mentors. The one thing for the Inupiaq region, that would include North Slope, the [indiscernible] region and Kotzebue, and then Bering Straits, where I am from, they put it upon themselves to do a survey, language survey, who speaks fluently, who are the beginners and the ones in between.

So between our young people and the elders that are out there, I think working cooperatively that way would really bring a good picture to the status of our languages. For example, the villages east of Nome, maybe there are one or fluent speakers left in their small community. It is beginning to look that way of the villages north of Nome, Shismaref, Diomede, Wales. King Island is what I speak.

So working with our young people, and making sure we are coming at it with teachers that are able to speak the language with mentors is very important. So having the statistics, number of speakers is very helpful. Thank you, Senator Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Let me ask one more quick question of you. We are also looking at the effort to foster the relationship between Native language programs and institutes of higher education, so you have Ilisagvik up north, and wanting to encourage that. But is this something where, in your view, we need to be focusing on the early learners, the kids, and getting them part of this, so that the language is continued? Or is it something that at this point in time we need to be focusing on the connection with those in higher education?

I think there is a sense of urgency in so many of our communities, because as you say, we are losing our Native speakers. So maybe we need to focus on everybody. It just can't be the children. It can't be those in college. It needs to be that whole gamut.

Ms. ALVANNA-STIMPFLÉ. Thank you for that question. I believe it is really important to work with our young people for them to become speakers of our language. Also, it is very important for them to learn how to speak to our children. Because our language, Inupiaq, is very long. It can be one sentence in English.

So how we speak to our children is very important. They need to grow into becoming fluent Inupiaq speakers as they get older. So starting with our young people, late teens, early 20s, to get them comfortable in speaking. Because we still have generations, older generations, that have been hurt from their past and traumatized for not speaking their language, language that they don't really want to share or they get angry if young people aren't saying things correctly.

So when to put those young people in a safe place, especially to learn how to talk to our children, and trying to kill all the birds with one stone, so everyone is included. And also making sure that we are protecting our elders. My daughter, who is the first ever Inupiaq immersion teacher, she prepared for this when she was in high school, by the way. She felt like she couldn't invite any elders into her classroom during COVID, the 70- and 80-year-olds.

But my niece and I, who is only a few years younger than me, she told me yesterday, you are in your early 60s, so with the protection that we both had, with all the students, we were able to go in every day. My niece went in every day and I went in two times a week to mentor.

When I listened to her teach and say maybe a vowel wrong within a long word that I [indiscernible] repeat, repeat it correctly. So those are the situations we need to create. Thank you.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you. You have done a great job with your daughters. I know that personally. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Smith.

Senator SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I really appreciate this conversation. It is very interesting. I would like to follow up with some of the same kinds of questions as Senator Murkowski was asking, and direct them toward Leslie Harper. It is wonderful to be with you, Ms. Harper.

I am really interested in talking about the role of Native elders in language revitalization and preservation. We know also of course that the pandemic has hit Native elders hard. We don't have great data on what has happened with the pandemic's toll on Native speakers. But I know that in Minnesota's Native language programs, including Niigaane, that you have founded, you rely a lot on elders. As I understand it, you pair up Native speaking elders with people who speak Ojibwe as a second language in your programs for kindergarten through sixth grade.

Ms. Harper, could you just talk a little bit about how you have seen the pandemic affect Native elder language speakers, and your work to preserve and revitalize the Ojibwe language?

Ms. HARPER. Miigwech, thank you for that question, Senator. I always love hearing your Ojibwe language, too.

[Laughter.]

Ms. HARPER. So in our Minnesota context, we are losing our master speakers, our elderly population of speakers. They are aging out. In the decade that I spent with our language immersion school, we did keep a really grim census, a count of our elderly language speakers who were master speaker resources upon whom we could rely.

We found at that time we had a couple hundred folks who we could go out into our communities and choose from. By 2012, by the year 2012, it had greatly reduced. By the year 2014, that number had greatly reduced. Our people have shorter life expectancies. They have different health issues.

So we were already having a shrinking pool of elder first speakers to work with. And that was our dream. They are quality control, these that are our master speakers. Folks our age, we had to work as adults to learn the language and to be existing in these environments and to create intentional language-rich environments. So we have the gift of these master speakers to pair up and to do this with.

Fast forward from 2014 even until now, our master speakers, the population is going down, and really, it has been a difficult, difficult year. The pandemic really has hit us hard.

So that is speaking from my own, my very own community. We have Dakota communities in Minnesota who already had critically low numbers, even really a couple years back could say, we can count on one hand. Now our Dakota relatives cannot even count a handful of our speakers.

So this goes across the Country. We are now relying on, are we training and supporting our adult language learners to honor the legacy that these elder speakers have left for us? We have recordings and we have documentation and all of these models. We may not have our living speakers with us in so many of these contexts.

So now it is on the coming generation to say, indeed, are we honoring, are we learning to a level that is far enough and deep enough to support these efforts, as well as bringing up our kids in our languages.

Senator SMITH. So what I am hearing you say is that it is a combination of connecting with and doing these language immersion programs, but also, you have to simultaneously reach out to older, to adults. Maybe you could just talk a little bit about this question. I have heard from others, you and I haven't spoken about this, I have heard about this from other tribes in Minnesota that are doing language and culture centers. The question of how you get adults to connect with learning the language, which of course is difficult, if they are not first speakers. Also, that learning is associated with all sorts of trauma related to Federal Government programs around separation and boarding schools. So you have that on top of it.

I know I am out of time, but could you just take a minute to say what you are learning about how to make that connection and bridge that trauma where you can?

Ms. HARPER. We reach out to the other Native language programs that we meet that are active in our State, but even across the Country. When we see folks doing something that is working to produce new speakers and to work through those losses and those pains, we say, what are the principles underlying that? Can you tell us more about that? Can we try to recreate that here?

These are all really intentional practices that need to be intentionally considered and designed and given strong capacity to operate. We don't want to throw in one overworked language worker, language revitalizer, into doing a job that really takes many, many

members, many good relatives in the community to do, to build a healthy communicating language speaking community. Does that help?

Senator SMITH. Yes, thank you very much. We are grateful for you. Miigwech for joining our Committee. I will see you soon.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Hoeven.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN HOEVEN,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NORTH DAKOTA**

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What I would like to ask each one of our witnesses today is, how the two bills that we are considering, were considered in our business meeting and we are working on, how can those two bills help preserve Native languages, number one. And the second, what do you think would be the number one thing this Committee could do to help?

I would ask each of the witnesses, if they would, to address that. We can start with Commissioner Sauve.

Ms. SAUVE. Thank you, Senator Hoeven.

I would want to defer to my fellow witnesses on this, because some of it is outside the purview of HHS. I know that the language resource center will be housed at Department of Education, so I look forward to hearing their responses to this question.

Senator HOEVEN. And do you have any recommendations for this Committee, something that you would like to see us do that you feel would be particularly helpful?

Ms. SAUVE. What I would do is hearken back to a project we did in ANA several years ago through HHS Ignite. We spoke with our grantees and while we shared, what they shared with us is that that peer-to-peer learning is particularly important. So they want more of that. We do try to do that through the National Native American Languages Summit that we have been doing as part of the memorandum of agreement we have with the Department of Interior and the Department of Education. We have had seven annual Native language summits.

But much more than the bills that you have proposed that take what we have been able to do, just sort of on a shoestring budget, much further. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Senator HOEVEN. Who would like to go next?

Mr. HOSKIN. Senator, just briefly, the resource center will be vital. I certainly can see the wisdom in that.

The Durbin Feeling Act to do a survey of resources is very important. At Cherokee Nation, we have a talented staff of men and women who scour the Country, particularly D.C., for those opportunities. But I think it will help all of Indian Country.

It is easy to say that more dollars will help save the language. That is a true statement, as simple as that is. The truth of the matter is, at Cherokee Nation, what we are trying to do is increase the supply of those speakers through our efforts to create fluent speakers, so we can combat this loss of our fluent speakers.

One thing we have to do is we have to create the demand for speakers. I think it varies across tribal lands what the opportunities are. But anything that Congress can do and the Federal agencies can do, the relevant agencies can do, to help support the cre-

ation of a way for Native speakers to make a living speaking their language, and this is in the space of teaching the language, it is in the space of creative arts, which is particularly exciting to me. We have a Cherokee language cartoon that we have developed and want to continue to develop, and other tribes have explored different strategies, but also strategies surrounding cartoons to reach out to young kids.

I think we have to remember that part of losing a language is that it was robbed of its relevancy. Anything we can do to renew and revitalize what it means to use the language every day we should do. I think that could take some resources from the government of the United States to help us to do that.

So I would just make that future pitch for that particular use of resources.

Senator HOEVEN. Ms. Harper?

Ms. HARPER. Miigwech, thank you for asking that question.

I turned in a much longer testimony than five minutes of oral statements gave me. I would like to talk about, at the amazing levels, the heroic levels of work and the multiple pieces of work that people do to revitalize languages in any of our communities, then our Native language medium programs and schools that are operating. Those people are doing tons of work. They are. They are developing curriculum; they are looking at ways to teach all of these different age levels. They are creating materials. They are developing infrastructure. They are developing new philosophies for our tribal and for local governments to base different policies on, branching out from educational spaces.

So that means we have a lot of opportunities in there. I really appreciate that Chief Hoskin said the creative side of this. Every piece of our community can be tended to with Native American language support. So a language resource center that helps develop all of those abilities to help build capacity for communities to reach and build new speakers and new domains for our language to be active in is going to be really helpful.

Then we also talk about an issue with, very specifically, with our Native American language schools and programs is again this idea around invisibility. There is not a lot of language medium schools operating yet in the Country because they are a really big thing to take on, to operate all day in a Native American language with all these school groups of kids.

So we often get left out of data. So even if you see pieces of studies where they say, Native kids are doing this, this, and this, sometimes you don't see language medium school students, sometimes you don't see the immersion language nest or language school students included in there. Because we are a small population within this broader area.

So being able to look at the Durbin Feeling Language Act and really, really develop those ways to collect the data and to report it back out is going to show a better picture and provide better representation for our Native language efforts in a lot of different areas around our communities.

Senator HOEVEN. Thank you. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, I am over my time. I had better stop there. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. It was a good question, Senator Hoeven. Thank you.

Chief Hoskin, let's step back just a little bit. Why did the Cherokee Nation decide to undertake the Cherokee Special Rule Project and do you think a national survey of Native languages and speakers as proposed in Durbin Feeling would have similar benefits with other Native communities?

Mr. HOSKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe it would. The survey of language speakers did something pretty powerful here in Cherokee Nation. It seems simple to say, how many speakers do we have. We have estimates. But to not only see a more accurate number, but to also witness what it meant for the speakers, many of whom are on in years, over the age of 70, to feel as if they were memorializing their special and unique place in the world is really of immeasurable benefit.

It also though has allowed us to sort of identify where across our reservation they live. That is informing some of our strategies to not only invest here in our capital of Tahlequah, but to look at where we might expand immersion schools, look at where we might create new speaker villages close to where they live. It is important to keep communities together for so many reasons, but particularly language speakers.

The other thing it did was unexpected when we did the speaker survey and began that a couple of years ago. This gets a little bit off the topic of language preservation, but still relevant. When we put fluent speakers at the front of the line for COVID-19 vaccines, we had that document to go by. I am so proud to say that even though, in the Cherokee Nation reservation, our vaccination rates are far too low, and we are making efforts every day to increase that, our fluent speakers are vaccinated at a rate of around 70 percent because of the efforts we undertook, and because we had that survey.

It got us thinking about how else we might improve the quality of lives of our speakers. Every Cherokee deserves good housing, education, and to have a place in the economy that works for them. But we have to focus on our speakers, and this survey allows us to find them.

So for so many reasons, some of which were unexpected when we started this, it has been a very powerful tool.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Harper, at our COVID-19 impacts on Native education hearings, one of our witnesses, Dr. Kamana from Nawahi Immersion School spoke about the challenges she had both prior to and during the pandemic with immersion materials development and teacher training. Are these issues that you see popping up across your coalition members?

Ms. HARPER. Certainly, Senator. These issues are consistent across language medium schools and programs out here.

As I was just saying, our language medium [indiscernible] educators at our site, all of these materials. They are the ones creating and delivering the teacher training for their local sites, for their languages. We can go anywhere in Indian Country and see this happening. They are doing it locally. Because they are the world class experts. This is the last place where our languages exist.

There aren't outside sources to go to for these developments and any of this.

So Native American languages and our cultures are making their resources right onsite. We hear that. Any one of the other folks who testified here today too would say we hear that in national conversations when we talk about Native language revitalization issues.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

My final question, for Ms. Sauve, has ANA heard concerns from Native communities about the copyright of Native language materials by non-community members? If you have heard about this, can we work together on solving this?

Ms. SAUVE. Thank you, Chairman Schatz, for that question.

We have heard about this in a couple of cases. In fact, we wanted to know what we should do about it. So we have had tribal consultation last summer, and this was one of the topics for ANA. There were definitely mixed recommendations for it. Some of the recommendations are that we shouldn't be paternalistic.

So requiring that tribes or others have, the copyright belong to the tribe, that was one of the suggestions we mentioned. But they said, you know what, that is paternalistic, so please just do more education for grantees so they understand the risks when they get into partnership.

So that is what we are doing. We have been doing webinars. We addressed it at our National Native Language summit. And we are including information about that in our funding announcements so that folks can make sure they know that this could potentially be an issue and take steps to do it.

So we would absolutely like to partner with you to strengthen the copyright so that the languages remain with the people.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. I don't want to overreact here, but I would like to understand the extent of the problem and also the extent to which Congress could actually, or the Executive Branch, could do anything about it. Let's continue this conversation.

Vice Chair Murkowski.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Very interesting. Hadn't thought about that part of it.

Another question for you, Acting Director Sauve. We heard certainly from Ms. Alvanna-Stimpfle the issue of capacity and the fact that small tribes have just limited capacity when it comes to writing and managing complex Federal grants to help support their language programs. Your testimony talks about the tremendous time, effort and resource investment that communities have to undertake in order to implement Native language projects.

So just recognizing again, capacity limitations, all that we have seen, the additional stressors with this past year due to COVID, what has ANA done to alleviate some of these burdensome administrative requirements that just compound the challenge for some of our tribal communities to be able to access these grant opportunities?

Ms. SAUVE. Thank you for that question, Vice Chair Murkowski.

In order to support our current grantees, ANA exercised the flexibilities provided through the Administration for Children and Families and OMB. We extended reporting deadlines, any requests

for a carryover budget or no-cost extensions. We also streamlined the continuing application process and we worked with our Office of Grants Management so we could request enough information but not overly burdensome for our current grantees to continue to receive funding from ANA.

I am very happy that we worked across ACF with our General Counsel to create a very streamlined application for the emergency language awards that will greatly reduce the time and effort to apply as well as the reporting burden. So we do understand that communities are under extreme stress and are trying to alleviate whatever burdens we can.

Senator MURKOWSKI. So it seems that you are trying to be as attentive as possible to that. I appreciate that.

Let me ask my last question to Ms. Laehā. I want to thank you and the rest of the State of Hawaii for hosting our Alaska Native language speakers as they are working on their advanced studies. I mentioned that in my introduction of Ms. Alvanna-Stimpfle. As I mentioned earlier to Chairman Schatz, our two States have a lasting relationship where Alaska sends Hawaii our Native speakers and you send them back ready to train and instruct the next generation of Native speakers.

In your testimony, you discuss the need to formally develop a consortium between American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian serving institutions that work to support school and community-based language revitalization. I guess the question to you today would be, what more DOI and ANA programs can do working in a coordinated manner to support the development of this Native language preservation and this partnership? I look at the value and the benefit. I think we can see how that plays out between Alaskans and Hawaiians, and how we can do more to further this.

Ms. LAEHA. Mahalo for that question.

I think that we definitely learned a lot between sharing, about our resources and our experiences. I do think that these two bills that we have here would help to support that.

In addition, I know that we talked a lot about funding for projects like these. A lot of what is coming up, I want to echo what everyone is saying, we face similar issues in terms of what we have access to, what are staff are required to do.

So really just leaning into each other and being able to share amongst each other is very important. I think paying special attention to the other things I brought up earlier, which are how we as communities, as indigenous language communities, or Native American language communities, define what is needed for the program in order for that program to be effective. A quality program is a very important point as well.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Thank you for that.

To what extent, I know we have all been doing business differently, whether it is by Zoom or virtually, we figured things out because we had to in this time of pandemic and living in different bubbles, working in different bubbles. To what extent can these relationships, for instance what we are talking about with, between Alaska and Hawaii, benefit from the fact that we are just doing so much more virtually? Or is this something where you really need

to be present and on the ground as you are going through these kinds of training?

Ms. LAEHĀ. I definitely think that all of the communities and industries have learned a lot about working remotely and what works and what doesn't. I think there are a lot of ways that we can collaborate virtually. However, there is just something about being in the presence of a thriving language program that helps you really understand and believe what is possible for your own community. I think that is something that we can't say can be achieved as effectively over a virtual medium like this.

Senator MURKOWSKI. Yes. I appreciate what you shared there. I think you are probably right, we figured out ways to make it work. But it can be made to work better if it truly is that one on one.

Mr. Chairman, thank you. This has been an important hearing, again, from so many levels. It is not just the words that are spoken, it is the culture that is attached to these incredible languages. The ability to highlight that through the Committee today is greatly appreciated.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Vice Chair Murkowski.

If there are no more questions for our witnesses, members may also submit follow-up written questions for the record. The hearing record will be open for two weeks. I want to thank all of our excellent witnesses for their time and for their testimony and for their service today.

This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:23 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SYLVIA M. HUSSEY, ED.D., CEO, OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Aloha e Chairman Schatz:

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on the May 26, 2021, Oversight Hearing on “Examining the COVID-19 Response in Native Communities: Native Languages One Year Later” and Legislative Hearing to receive testimony on S. 989 and S. 1402. Mahalo a nui loa for your continued leadership in ensuring the federal government meets its trust responsibility owed to all Native Americans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Your leadership is especially appreciated in the preservation, protection, and promotion of Native American languages. We must support the expansion of Native American language teaching and learning because language is the key to Native culture and identity. As we have seen in Hawai‘i, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened Native American language survival and the programs that support Native American languages. Native American language inclusion in federal language programs can help to offset the harms inflicted by this pandemic. With this in mind, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) Board of Trustees (BOT) formally voted on April 29, 2021, to support your bill, S. 989, the Native American Language Resource Center Act of 2021, as it was introduced on March 25, 2021. We look forward continuing to work with you and to supporting your work to enact this legislation into law.

The Role and Responsibilities of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs

Established by our state’s Constitution,¹ OHA is a semi-autonomous agency of the State of Hawai‘i mandated to better the conditions of Native Hawaiians. Guided by a board of nine publicly elected trustees, all of whom are currently Native Hawaiian, OHA fulfills its mandate through advocacy, research, community engagement, land management, and the funding of community programs.

Hawai‘i state law recognizes OHA as the principal public agency in the state responsible for the performance, development, and coordination of programs and activities relating to Native Hawaiians.² Furthermore, state law directs OHA to advocate on behalf of Native Hawaiians;³ to advise and inform federal officials about Native Hawaiian programs; and to coordinate federal activities relating to Native Hawaiians.⁴

The Federal Trust Responsibility Owed to Native Hawaiians

As you know, the federal government owes a trust responsibility to all Native Americans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. To meet this obligation to Native Hawaiians, Congress has enacted programs and policies to promote education, health, housing, and a variety of other federal programs that support Native Hawaiian self-determination. Similar to American Indians and Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians have never relinquished our right to self-determination despite the United States’ involvement in the illegal overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893 and the dismantling of our government.

Over 150 Acts of Congress consistently and expressly acknowledge or recognize a special political and trust relationship to Native Hawaiians based on our status as the Indigenous, once-sovereign people of Hawai‘i. Among these laws specifically benefitting Native Hawaiians are the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920, 42 Stat. 108 (1921); the Native Hawaiian Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 7511; the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act, 42 U.S.C. ch. 122; and the Hawaiian Homelands Homeownership Act codified in the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act, Title VIII, 25 U.S.C. § 4221.

¹HAW. CONST., art. XII, § 5 (1978).

²Haw. Rev. Stat. § 10-3(3).

³Haw. Rev. Stat. § 10-3(4).

⁴Haw. Rev. Stat. § 10-6(a)(4).

Background on the History of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

In pre- and post-contact society, Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners passed down traditional practices orally through ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language). Native Hawaiian society and the Kingdom of Hawai‘i valued education for its people. In addition to the oral cultural education passed down through generations, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i became a written language and was the medium in schools established in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. In the 1800s, over 250 Hawaiian language medium schools were in operation. During that time, almost all Native Hawaiians were literate, and the Kingdom boasted one of the highest literacy rates in the world.

The overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom and United States’ participation in the overthrow changed the trajectory of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiian education. During this time, the United States maintained control over the government of the Territory of Hawai‘i. The President of the United States appointed the Territorial Governor who in turn appointed the Territorial Board of School Commissioners. The President also appointed the Territory’s non-Article III judges, and the United States Congress maintained the right to amend or invalidate laws passed by the Territorial Legislature. American-run schools banned the speaking of ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i on campuses. The federal government also enforced a policy of assimilation upon the Native Hawaiian people similar to those forced upon American Indian and Alaska Native communities during that same era. By the 1960s, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i was near extinction. Only 2,000 speakers remained in the 1980s. However, around that time, the Hawaiian Renaissance began to take hold and Native Hawaiian leaders worked tirelessly to revive Native Hawaiian traditional practices and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i.

In 1983, Native Hawaiian leaders and community members created Punana Leo, a Native Hawaiian immersion preschool. The first group of students educated entirely in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i graduated from high school in 1999. Their success was the direct result of continued advocacy from the families involved with the immersion school movement. Hawaiian-medium education has grown since those early days, and it is now possible to receive an education in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i from preschool through doctoral program. These programs not only revitalized Native Hawaiian traditional practices and ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, but they also continue to offer students a sense of connectedness and place through this education system. Despite the successes of these programs, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed unprecedented burdens on Native American language programs and tested the survival of Native American languages. The successes of these programs, and the extensive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on them, emphasize the need to continue to include Native American languages in language programs across the federal government.

Supporting the Native American Language Resource Center Act

Native American language preservation, protection, and promotion is a critical component of honoring the trust responsibility owed to Native Americans. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services already administers several Native American language programs through the Administration for Native Americans. However, Native American languages should be supported through programs administered across all federal agencies. More work is needed to include Native American language education in general federal language programs.

To this end, OHA supports the incorporation of Native American languages into Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. §§ 1123, 1132-37) by creating the Native American Language Resource Center (NALRC) within the International and Foreign Language Education (IFLE) office in the Office of Postsecondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. This office is well-equipped with the knowledgebase to administer the NALRC in addition to existing Language Resource Centers. IFLE programs support domestic and international language instruction, professional development for educators, and curriculum development for education at all levels. These programs expand access to language learning, particularly in underserved communities, and support teaching and research on critical world language issues, among other things. Language Resource Centers, in particular, allow for the development of language learning materials; provide professional development; and conduct research to strengthen language teaching and learning.

Again, mahalo a nui loa for the opportunity to provide testimony for the record and for your continued support of the Native Hawaiian people and Native American language preservation programs. As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, we must rebuild and recover. Supporting Native American language programs will help to restore Native identity through language preservation, protection, and promotion. We hope that you will incorporate Native languages into federal language programs across all agencies.

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. BEN RAY LUJÁN TO
MICHELLE SAUVE

Question 1. In 2020, I was proud to work with Sen. Udall to pass the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act into law. This law made important changes to the Administration for Native Americans language grant programs, including the Esther Martinez Immersion and Preservation & Maintenance grant programs, to reduce class sizes for Native American Survival Schools (for school age children from 15 to 10 students and for students under age 7 from 10 to 5 students) and extend the maximum grant period (from 3 to 5 years). Ms. Sauve, how have the smaller class sizes and longer grant period benefitted grant recipients of both programs, especially during the pandemic?

Answer. In the two years since the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act has passed, we have yet to gather and analyze enough data to indicate how this reauthorization may have benefitted these new EMI programs in terms of longer project periods or smaller class size. We receive consistent feedback from our grantees in support of small classroom instruction and anticipate increased benefits from the reauthorization.

Our grantees continue to stress that smaller classroom sizes and longer grant periods increase learning benefits and to make survival schools more accessible to communities. Our grantees have voiced that the speaker to learner ratio should not exceed 1:7 with ideally two speakers of the target language so that the learners can hear speakers conversing, not just speaking didactically. A small classroom size allows children to deeply engage with teachers and allows teachers to create specialized learning plans for their students.

Question 2. In 2019, the Ohkay Owingeh Department of Education was awarded the Administration for Native Americans Native Languages Preservation and Maintenance Grant for the funding years 2019–2022. The Ohkay Owingeh Tewa Language Program has benefitted tremendously from being awarded the ANA Language Preservation and Maintenance Grant and the Pueblo is grateful that they are able to keep Esther Martinez’s legacy of language preservation efforts alive in her home of Ohkay Owingeh. This program was one of two reauthorized in the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act, named for Esther Martinez who led her life to further language preservation in her own Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh. Thanks to the changes included in the reauthorization that allowed for smaller class sizes of grantees, current and future grantees have been able to host smaller, in-person classes. Ms. Sauve, what benefits have you seen to allowing for smaller class sizes for program grantees of both the Esther Martinez Immersion and the Preservation & Maintenance grant programs?

Answer. Our grantees from both the EMI and P&M projects emphasize that smaller class sizes are always favorable. Increased participation and individually focused curriculum allow students to deeply engage linguistically and culturally. We have visual confirmation that small classroom sizes allow creativity in lesson planning such as teaching cultural traditions in tandem with language education. Grantees have brought culturally specific lesson plans such as pottery lessons, or cooking classes, into their language classrooms. Moreover, they emphasize that it is important to engage students in their language, but also the language’s inherent connection to cultural activities. Such creative lesson plans would not have been possible with a large number of students due to budgetary or logistic concerns.

Question 3. Ohkay Owingeh has hosted Tewa classes during the pandemic by bringing back a small group (capped at five people) consisting of Tribal and community members and two Tewa teachers. They have also been able to host two groups of five youth participants in their Tewa Summer Youth Program. Ms. Sauve, how has the Administration for Native Americans changed program guidelines and reporting during the pandemic to allow for flexibilities for grantees like Ohkay Owingeh?

Answer. We applaud the persistence and creativity of projects that yield innovative ways to offer continuing services. Our program specialists and technical assistance providers work closely with grantees to ensure that changes in activities or approach are still in line with the overall goals and objectives of their funded project.

We recognize that the COVID–19 pandemic has put a strain on tribal resources and personnel. The Administration of Children and Families has released several iterations of grant policy flexibilities. Notably, we have allowed flexibilities regarding reporting deadlines, and increased time for expiring No-Cost Extensions. Increased time for reporting allows ample time for recipient assessments, the resumption of many individual projects, and a report on program progress and financial status. Expiring no-cost extensions also allow for an additional 12 month project extension to finish project activities and spend funds. It is our priority to assist tribes

in ensuring that they have ample time to complete their project successfully. Per HHS pre-existing funding guidelines, grant recipients are able to reallocate up to 25 percent of their budget within existing line items without prior approval, so this is an additional flexibility that allowed the projects that had travel budgeted into their projects to reallocate those resources to other areas.

Question 4. Ms. Sauve, many of our witnesses noted the impact that the loss of fluent speakers has had on language preservation efforts. Noting this, there is a role for digital media to play in building healthy language communities in the wake of this pandemic. Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, for example, has created a Tewa Zoom Class to allow Tribal and community members to continue to learn their language and culture while maintaining social distancing guidelines during the pandemic. These virtual class offerings have enabled the Pueblo to bring their language and culture to Tribal members who live out of state, including those in Arizona, California, and Connecticut. Additionally, Ohkay Owingeh began recording and saving all Tewa zoom classes to external hard drives to kick start the process of digitizing its language and culture instructional materials. Ms. Sauve, what is the Administration for Native Americans doing or plan to do to support Tribal Nations who wish to digitize or transfer language materials to new media? And what is the Administration for Native Americans doing to educate grantees on the dangers of allowing access to digital language materials to non-authorized users?

Answer. The pandemic has brought about a unique opportunity to engage students and teachers with digital material. We have seen increased participation through digital language learning platforms that can reach new language learners who would previously have been unable to attend in person classes. ANA recognizes the creative benefits of digital language materials and encourages grantees to prepare for virtual learning. We have encouraged investment in digital technology through allowing flexibilities to adjust their budgets to allow for additional purchasing of equipment, or technological training.

ANA highly encourages tribes to be aware of their rights to intellectual property rights and data sovereignty. In the past, we have provided trainings at grantee meetings and webinars through ANA's Training and Technical Assistance centers. In addition, ANA included a statement in all FY 2021 FOAs encouraging applicants to educate themselves on intellectual property rights and the protection of ownership of Native language materials, ceremonies, music and dance, and other forms of knowledge and cultural practices that originate from Native communities. However, due to the variety of laws, rights, and jurisdictions of these matters, ANA leaves this up to the discretion of grantees and applicants.

Question 5. Despite COVID-19 challenges, Ohkay Owingeh and all Tribal Nations remain committed to cultural traditions and practices. For example, the Ohkay Owingeh Community School, and their Ohkay Owingeh Head Start, continued Tewa Zoom class sessions for Head Start and elementary students as a way to connect students with each other focused on Tewa curriculum during the pandemic. Tewa teachers, who teach in all grades and various styles of classes, have been innovative and creative with teaching language and traditions. The Administration for Native Americans grant is a step toward supporting their larger goal of Tewa fluency and cultural engagement, but right now the Administration is only able to support a handful of grantees like Ohkay Owingeh through its competitive grant process. However, with the historic decision to allocate funding to all Tribes that opt in thanks to \$20 million provided in the American Rescue Plan, the administration stands to make an incredible impact on Native language programs across the country. How will the Administration for Native Americans document and share the impact that this funding will have on potentially hundreds of Tribes during the pandemic?

Answer. ANA will require ARP emergency language award recipients to submit a post project report. In this report, ANA will ask grantees how the funds helped their communities use language and culture revitalization to recover from the devastating effects of COVID-19. Grantees will also be asked about how the materials created, teachers trained, and student instruction helped preserve and protect their Native language. ANA will compare data from the applications describing the current condition of the language prior to the community receiving funding with a post-project data survey. This will allow us to measure the impacts of the funding on the community and language and share the story of this distinct set of grantees.

Question 6. You note that the Administration for Native Americans was only able to fund 11 of the 75 applications between both of its programs in the most recent year. How many Tribal Nations were served by funded applications out of all the Tribal Nations represented in the entire applicant pool? And what was the average funding amount per applicant in the most recent fiscal year?

Answer. Of the 11 new awards last year, ANA was able to fund five out of the 42 applications from Tribal Nations. The average funding request for FY 2020 was \$228,202 for both EMI and P&M.

