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The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

August 14th, 2024

Dear Secretary Haaland,

We hope this letter finds you and your dedicated team happy, healthy, and flourishing. We take pen in hand today in acknowledgment and gratitude of the release of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Reports. Additionally, we wish to express our respect and deep appreciation for you, your team, and the tremendous lift and love necessary to complete this effort. We can only imagine the many associated emotions that this project evoked, and the toll that it took on those tasked with completing this historical and important work. Thank you for undertaking the breadth of the difficult effort embedded in the journey of uncovering history's wrongs, and digesting the scattered pieces of an untold story into a comprehensive and unapologetic account the world can finally access in a truthful manner.

For some, understanding the weight and impacts of the Federal Indian Boarding School chapter in Native American history may best start by focusing on a single child, solitary story, or individual institution, because the cumulative, emotional weight of the total numbers is too much grief for a psyche to adequately process. The report the department issued is full of such details that allow the reader to grasp whatever piece speaks to them most, while simultaneously assembling the pieces into a dawning comprehension that has been previously denied to the general population. The black hole into which the most innocent were pulled, isolated, and indoctrinated, if they survived at all, can only be demystified by the facts and honesty that your team pursued with reckless abandon, determination, and heart.

Quantifying this abyss no doubt required countless hours on the part of you and your team. Before you could even read the unending parade of depressing records, they had to be assembled, and before they could be assembled, they had to be identified. Similar to the force required to convert inertia to movement, the sheer manpower of data review for this project is praiseworthy - the necessary sacrifice to tackle the monstrosity of obfuscation. May your work begin to lift the lingering atmosphere of "identity-alteration methodologies," to quote your team, that still reach forward into Native lives today.

Because there is Strength in Unity

In analyzing this period of our shared history, the naked facts show the detrimental and systematic repurposing of Indigenous education from a trust and treaty obligation, into a pointed anthem of cultural annihilation that suited the agenda of the colonizer. Federal Indian Law and Policy is littered, even defined, by similar, pointed attempts at annihilation - cultural, mental, and physical. The sovereign rights of Tribal Nations today are perpetually challenged or conveniently neglected, impregnated with generational implications that will metastasize into further harm.

The inspiring lift evident in this groundbreaking piece should be the model for healing other chapters of oppression and human rights violations in the history of US-Tribal Nation relations rooted in federal Indian policies of assimilation, termination, removal, and taking. We hope it will pave the way for the return of our children to their Tribal communities—where many Native children remain captive in Indian Boarding School cemeteries today. Since you and your team have now converted inertia to movement, let's capitalize this moment by further converting movement into momentum that seeks greater honesty in the history of our relations, using this as the foundation for achieving greater justice, reconciliation, and fulfillment of trust and treaty obligations.

Your report ends with eight recommendations that create clear guideposts for transforming this historical recounting into future action aimed at healing. This list ignites dreams of what life could look like if these recommendations were implemented, as well as similar actions across lateral, Indigenous issues. The vision to contextualize this recounting of the past into action for the present and outcomes for the future is the currency of reclamation. Your vision inspires, and it will continue to do so for years to come.

With gratitude and respect,



Kirk Francis, President
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CC: Bryan Newland, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs