

**Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
Office of Head Start**

Virtual Tribal Consultation – Summary Report

**Geographic Regions 9 & 10
September 21, 2021**

OHS Representatives

Shawna Pinckney, Acting Deputy Director, Office of Head Start

Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager, Region XI American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN)

Heather Wanderski, Program Operations Division Director

Trevondia Boykin, Supervisory Program Specialist, Region 11

Delroy Grant, Supervisor Program Specialist, Region 11

Greeting and Introductions

Acting Deputy Director Shawna Pickney welcomed and greeted the attendees. She was very excited to be with everyone today. She sends her greetings from Dr. Bernadine Futrell who could not be with them today. However, she assures everyone that the Office of Head Start (OHS) is deeply invested in hearing and understanding the concerns of the Tribal Communities and tribal grantees.

Mr. Todd Lertjuntharangool welcomed and greeted the attendees. He gave a brief introduction, sharing his background and allowed the other members of the AIAN leadership team, Delroy Grant and Trevondia Boykin, to introduce themselves before transitioning to the OHS PowerPoint presentation.

Heather Wanderski, Program Operations Division Director, welcomed attendees, and expressed her excitement to attend today's consultation as this is her very first Tribal Consultation. Before turning the meeting over to Mr. Todd Lertjuntharangool, she recognized his hard work and thanked him for his service as a liaison, keeping her updated about what's happening and the things that can be done to make things better for the OHS programs.

Mr. Todd Lertjuntharangool welcomed and greeted the attendees. He gave a brief introduction, sharing his background and allowed the other members of the AIAN leadership team, Delroy Grant and Trevondia Boykin, to introduce themselves before transitioning to the OHS PowerPoint presentation.

OHS Overview and Updates

**Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager
OHS**

FY2020 Tribal Consultations

OHS scheduled four Virtual Tribal Consultations in 2020. We did have one that ended up getting canceled because the tribal leaders who were scheduled to attend could not make it. But, out of those consultations, the topics that we heard most about were internet broadband and technology accessibility for our programs, income eligibility, staffing, funding levels, and the need for support around facilities.

As we move into a second program year in this pandemic, we wanted to provide a summary of operations for our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The table shown on the screen shows the fluctuations in program operating status between September of 2020 and April of 2021. The table shows programs who reported that they were open and providing in-person services, open and providing both in person and virtual services, open and providing virtual/remote only, programs who reported that they were closed, and also programs who had not reported. We ended in April with approximately 15% of our programs reporting that they were providing in-person services, 32% reported that they were providing a hybrid service, so in-person and virtual. 30% reported that they were providing virtual services, only. 2% have reported they were closed and we had, at the time of the capture this information, 21% had not yet reported their status for that month. So, as you can see, over the course of the last program year, operations really did fluctuate. Of course, a lot of that was driven by safety in the communities and the various upticks in coronavirus cases and things like that in the community.

FY21 Funding Update

For Fiscal Year 2021 OHS is projected to fund approximately \$302 million to our tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs and that figure there does include the \$3.5 million increase we received for COLA, in fiscal year 2021. We do also fund \$4 million to Tribal Colleges and Universities and Head Start partnerships. Currently, we have six tribal colleges and universities that receive these grants. The goal of these grants is to increase the number of credentialed staff at tribal Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act and American Recovery Plan (ARP)

In 2021 OHS awarded \$6.5 million in Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) to tribal programs. Right now, we are projected to award tribal programs \$25.8 million from the American Recovery Plan (ARP). Most ARP awards were issued in early July.

Going back to 2020, OHS awarded tribal programs over \$19 million in CARES Act funding. Here you will see a spend plan that our grant recipients reported to us about how they actually utilize that funding. Most of that funding, approximately 28% went towards equipment and supplies needed to support remote delivery of program services. We were glad to see that a lot of our programs made big investments in terms of hardware and internet accessibility for their families and their staff. At the time this report was compiled, approximately 5% of grant recipients had not reported, so it does not reflect all grant recipients.

What have we been up to in 2021?

We definitely wanted to hear about your concerns and thoughts, in regard to programs moving forward and specifically, around the Program Instruction (PI) OHS issued on May 20, 2021. That PI communicated expectations and provided guidance on operating status and enrollment, specifically the expectation that programs begun to transition to move back toward approved program options, as health conditions in the community allow of course, and the communication that enrollment OHS will begin reviewing monthly enrollment and beginning in January of 2022, OHS will reinstate pre-pandemic practices for tracking and monitoring of enrollment. It also touched on virtual and remote services and clarified that those virtual services will not be considered as an approvable permanent operating option going forward but we encouraged programs to develop policies and procedures for how virtual services could be utilized in the event of emergencies or for weather-related closures. The PI also encouraged

programs to initiate new, updated community assessments. As a result of the pandemic, so many factors of communities have changed and we believe new community assessments will be beneficial in identify the current needs of children and families in communities and ensuring program designs are aligned with current needs.

Head Start Forward Campaign

To support programs as they make plans for a transition back to approved program options, OHS implemented the Head Start Forward Campaign. OHS has scheduled a 5 session webinar series to cover various topics of returning to in-person services. These have been scheduled for June 1st, June 23rd, July 14th, August 4th, and August 25th. We encourage all of our programs around the country to register and tune in.

AIAN Director Committees

One additional thing we did want to share with tribal leadership is our work around developing what we've referred to as, AIAN Director Committees. Working in conjunction with the National Indian Head Start Director's Association (NIHSDA) board, we've come up with a plan to develop committees consisting of tribal Head Start directors and those committees will support three different activities for Region XI. The first is we're going to have 5 Directors who will sit on the Region XI Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) Steering Committee. These 5 Directors will support OHS by providing input on various aspects of T/TA delivery, including things like materials and the content that's covered within those trainings. Next, we will develop a committee of 5 Directors to support our Annual Regional Needs Assessment. The Regional Needs Assessment is conducted annually to ensure our resources and efforts are targeted and allocated appropriately to meet the most urgent needs of our tribal programs. Lastly, a third committee will support our 2021 AIAN Conference Planning Committee, which we'll be facilitating in November. This committee will support efforts to ensure the sessions being facilitated are targeted, accurate, and relevant to what programs are actually experiencing on the ground. With this support, OHS is working to ensure all sessions offered at the conference are as beneficial and impactful to programs as possible.

2021 AIAN Conference

As stated above, on November 16th – 18th of 2021, OHS will facilitate our 2021 AIAN National Conference. This conference will be preceded by OHS's last tribal consultation session on November 15, 2021. The 2021 AIAN Conference will focus on the top priorities identified through the 2020 AIAN Regional Needs Assessment which include;

- 1.) **Governance/Program Design and Management** – This priorities was identified by the high number of monitoring findings in the previous monitoring season around lack of regular reporting to Governing bodies and a high number of tribal programs being under enrolled (*In February 2020, 1 month prior to the declaration of a national emergency due to the coronavirus, approximately 44% of tribal programs were at some point of the under enrollment process*)
- 2.) **Staffing** – This priority is focused on challenges experienced by grant recipients around recruiting and retaining staff, staff credentialing, and staff wages.
- 3.) **School Readiness** – This priority is focused on systems for staff ongoing professional development, strategic coaching systems to support ongoing development of staff, and ongoing improvements for teacher child interactions and child outcomes.
- 4.) **Fiscal** – This priority area was identified by monitoring findings around lack of fiscal systems and by a high number of programs closing fiscal years with large amounts of unobligated and unused funding.
- 5.) **Health, Disabilities, Mental Health** – This priority area was identified through the large number of monitoring findings around lack of health tracking systems, historical challenges

many programs faced around services to children with disabilities, and challenges around securing the support of a licensed mental health professional to support children, families, and staff.

OHS also welcomes input from tribal leaders on ways we can work together to support tribal programs with overcoming some of these ongoing challenges. OHS encourages tribal leaders and tribal programs to register for this national conference. The registration website was opened on August 30th. A link where you can register is provided here – [Click here to register now!](#)

Head Start Vaccine Mandates

On September 9, 2021 President Biden announced his administration's 6-pronged approach to ending the COVID-19 pandemic. These additional protocols and requirements for Head Start teachers and Head Start staff to be vaccinated. These protocols will be put into place by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the department has initiated a process for rulemaking to implement this executive order. This is something we look forward to hearing about from our programs.

Resources

Lastly in terms of resources, I do want to again refer folks to Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/>. We do have a specific page for COVID-19. This page is updated regularly, and I do want to encourage folks to check this from time to time just to ensure that you have the most updated information, guidance, and support.

Additionally, OHS has provided the MyPeers platform as a way for programs to support one another directly. Learn more about how you can sign up and access this platform here - <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/about-us/article/mypeers-social-network-early-childhood-professionals>

Meaningful Consultation with Sovereign Nations

Patricia Gonnig, Superintendent, Department of Dine Education Navajo Nation

Thank you. And I appreciate this opportunity to provide oral testimony on behalf of Navajo Nation. I am Pat Gonnig, I am currently serving in the acting capacity of Superintendent of Schools with Department of Dine Education. I wanted to, first of all, provide some background as to who we are as a Navajo Nation Head Start. Navajo Head Start is a large educational program for our youngest scholars here on the Nation. Age zero to five. We serve many families. This super grantee is federally funded to provide comprehensive services to 1,350 children, and their families within the 53 chapter communities that we serve on Navajo. Navajo Head Start employs over 300 staff members and provides hope and a strong start for children on the Navajo Nation to excel academically. We are all firm believers that a quality early childhood experience is key to students entering kindergarten with all of the appropriate readiness skills. Teachers, paraprofessionals, and bus drivers work together to provide a safe learning environment for children year-round at our duration sites and the Early Head Start sites that operate for 10 months of those seasonal Head Start sites.

Outside the classroom, we are seeing the world around our children vastly changing. On the Nation, the average household size is comprised of three persons. 10.4% of the Nation's population is between the ages of 15 and 19 years old. 96.1% of the population on Navajo Nation

is American Indian or Alaska native. The poverty rate for Navajo families with children under the age of five is 42.8%. The poverty rate on the Nation, in general, is 56.1%. Within Navajo Nation Head Start program 71.6% of the families meet the low-income guideline. The unemployment rate on Navajo Nation is 11 times higher than the general population. Navajo Head Start families deserve all the support needed to help their children succeed. Thereby more funding is always requested to help bolster the supports.

Only 22% of Navajo households have a telephone and only 15% of those households have a computer, which include a desktop computer, laptop, notebook, smartphone, or any other device designed to connect to the internet. This is an area that we have carefully monitored over the past year and a half of the pandemic during which time Navajo Head Start was closed for a period. The lack of technology makes it difficult for Navajo families to take advantage of online learning or staying in contact with their child's teacher. More education is needed for our families to help children grow and remain safe. An alarming 68.3% of children born experienced premature mortality and 4% of pregnant women on the Navajo Nation do not engage in prenatal care. Expected mothers and their infants need more supports. Navajo Head Start can provide this support through establishing more Early Head Start sites. Additionally, 27.9 out of 1,000 live births are children born to teenage mothers.

The Navajo Nation needs resources to provide wraparound services to teenage mothers. Navajo Head Start's presence and voice is needed at the 2001 Office of Head Start tribal consultation. And the invitation today is certainly appreciated. There are many families on Navajo Nation that we speak to and advocate for. And in the spirit of collaboration, Navajo Head Start provides the following testimony.

A.) Office of Head Start must increase foundational investment in early childhood programming.

1.) Training and Technical Assistance to our program. Navajo Head Start has the potential to be an independent system and needs more training and technical assistance to accomplish the goal. Coordination more effectively with all early childhood programs on Navajo Nation is so much needed. Regardless of the funding sources, we want to be able to blend the services for our families. Consistent and effective communication from Office of Head Start representative is essential for Navajo Head Start program to effectively coordinate early childhood programs and initiatives. Indeed, enhance communication and onsite assessments to evaluate challenges and benefits of the current structural layout of administering educational instruction is needed from the Office of Head Start administration and granting agency.

2.) Infrastructure. Office of Head Start should provide more funding opportunities and training and technical assistance for Tribal Head Start programs, enhancing support for cross-jurisdictional entities that have various rights of ways and services. Navajo Head Start needs financial investment to build collaborative efforts with other governmental entities and regulatory offices that will help increase outreach and services to remote isolated and impoverished communities. The nation needs overarching infrastructure to provide these direct services, and investments and support from Office of Head Start to create more infrastructure for Head Start services is needed.

3.) IT systems supports. Funding is needed to build a wide area network and technology infrastructure to reach out to the large land base of Navajo Nation, which is the service area of Navajo Head Start. Navajo Head Start serves over 86 communities that are located in remote and isolated areas. Additionally, funds are needed to recruit highly qualified IT to offer the extensive supports that are necessary, in these locations.

B.) Office of Head Start must respect and promote the unique internal governance structures of tribes. The federal government must undergo extensive cultural education when working with tribes. When we provide supports that are alike and not differentiated between the tribes that we serve, we fail to address the true needs of the tribal Head Start programs. Instead, we want to be able to be seen as to who we are, the differences amongst the tribes. We want to have our unique needs and circumstances considered. Office of Head Start must provide more culturally sensitive support, as well as accurate and consistent information. There should be a tribal liaison who has decision-making authority that is able to consistently and supportively help tribes administer the Head Start grant.

The Head Start grant is one of the most heavily regulated grants in the United States, and inconsistent, inaccurate and limited piecemeal support does not rise to the level of training and technical assistance statutorily required by Head Start regulations. The federal government must proactively acknowledge and address its institutional prejudice against tribes and work more collaboratively with tribal programs to ensure that they are receiving the supports that are needed.

Furthermore, the administration of Head Start program is exceedingly burdensome and inflexible sometimes, especially when it comes to tribal governments. Office of Head Start should allow more deference to tribal governments and acknowledgement of their sovereign right to self-govern, as opposed to imposing strict federal regulations that do not work well within these tribal governmental systems. There should be more deference to the internal self-governance of tribes in administration of the Head Start program.

C.) Office of Head Start must provide cross-program coordination and increased culturally supportive funding. Barriers to effective program administrations include politics and liability issues that affect initiatives intended to support early childhood, such as integrating programs into mainstream school systems. Externally funded programs are extremely underfunded. Externally funded programs have certain restrictive grant terms and conditions without negotiations afforded to tribal governance. Lack of training and technical assistance specific to individual tribes and lack of overall infrastructure development regarding technology, fiber optics, electricity and water and sewer development. Federal allocations and funding drawdowns are overly complicated and burdensome for tribes that already have internal government systems in place. There needs to be greater ability on the part of Office of Head Start to work with tribes more flexibly on funding allocations.

2.) Funding recommendations include increased funding to create large-scale internet along with equipment and software package to serve large Navajo Nation area to enhance childhood learning technology. For example, funding for Skype, Zoom in tribes, for meeting and teaching

tools for teachers and students. Funding for consultants for information technology to impact the rural areas on Navajo Nation.

Funding for IT storage space for data statistics on Navajo Nation, and funding for training on IT infrastructure. Increased funding and infrastructure for electrical system plans and connecting through internet nodes. Increased funding for water development, plumbing and road development. Increased funding for housing and school facilities, as some Head Start centers were built over 25 years ago. Increased funding for storage for Head Start facilities due to rural areas on Navajo Nation.

A need for intranet or usage of an internet cloud to gather and get materials needed for schools, data and news. Work in conjunction largely with 2020 census to ensure funding for each student. Increased funding for Dine language immersion culture, integrated with early childhood learning. Increased funding for computer equipment without approval from funding agency, for tablets for students for childhood learning.

Increased funding for glasses for students in Head Start. Increased funding for dental for students in early childhood learning. Increased funding for mental health and childhood learning, along with those with affected neurological learning disabilities detected early in early childhood years. Increased funding for bonus specialized teachers or those that have licensures and certificates in hard-to-fill positions.

Increased funding to integrate special diabetes program with early childhood learning and exercise. Increased funding to integrate elderly program with Head Start early childhood learning on Dine language stories and motor skills. Increased funding for safety in schools, such as provisions for security guards, security equipment for schools, safety classes and training for students, basic first aid for students in Head Start.

D.) Office of Head Start must increase its understanding of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Nation. With the lack of necessary internet and broadband technology to provide long distance learning across the large territory of Navajo Nation, e-learning and e-trainings are not readily accessible, and students already at risk of falling behind are seeing their small chance at success and academic support being ripped away from them due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These students must not fall even further behind because they live on the reservation.

Closures of Head Start centers risk the Nation's ability to provide essential support to the Nation's most vulnerable population, and without internet or widespread telephone access, it is extremely difficult for Navajo Head Start to provide support to these young students. Office of Head Start should continue to ease restrictions on approval of utilizing funds to address structural deficiencies, internet capabilities to tribal systems, and utilizing funds for hardware, software, servers and connectivity to ISP, as well as allowing for increased funding to larger Native American tribes to build their telecommunication infrastructure, while identifying early childhood education as a priority.

Other impacts from the pandemic on services to students include the social/emotional aspect of staff and community members. They have experienced fear, panic and anxiety here on the Nation. This impacts the motivation of staff and creates a lack of enthusiastic teachers, lack of community involvement in leadership and communities, losing certified and licensed teachers and/or bus drivers. Office of Head Start should help invest in mental health support for the staff.

The ability to teach is inhibited by lack of training and preparedness for such a pandemic. A lack of effective communication systems available to tribal communities from the funding agency to the tribal government. The initiation of the elder and children's generational lateral teaching are halted due to the lack of technology, transportation and funding. Lack of training and technical assistance from federal government and access to funding readily available to tribes. Tribes have to apply. Funding should be allowed for greater assistance to tribes. Tribes do not have a backup system in place for records, data or safety materials related to the pandemic.

E.) Resources needed for community mitigation of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. The Navajo Nation needs education resources to help educate the people of what a pandemic is and what it means regarding risks to life. The Nation has a large need for food, education, health for the region, with live statistic updates. The Nation needs more funding to identify and provide appropriate education packets as needed, based on location and demographics. Further scientific information from the federal government and Department of Health and Human Services regarding the extent of what the Nation is facing is given through third-party entities, and much of it is not factual. The current situation is also vague as states are beginning to open, but for tribal governments, it is uncertain when that will be.

Moving forward, changes to office settings and space will be an issue. Ideas of how this can be managed while controlling how students interact would be helpful. The federal government should mandate contracted entities to develop policies for students and instructional interaction. The severity of this virus is especially important in considering how much liability the federal government and tribal government want to assume. Moving forward, this may also relate to funding of health coverages for employees. The healthcare organizations on reservations do not have the capacity to handle the pandemic care needed. They are only clinics and not inpatient hospitals.

Other large item needs that we want to convey here is large internet platforms that are so much needed in order for staff members to interface with their teachers and students and families. Constant health awareness from Dine traditional teachings and philosophy. This is hard because of the cultural conflicts. Reassurance and investments from the Indian Health Services (IHS) to help our community stay healthy. Allowing the use of current funding with approval from funding agency, for safety collaborations and access to funding for each student and their family for food and safety.

I just want to give my appreciation once again for allowing an opportunity for Navajo Nation to lodge these concerns and issues from Navajo Nation. Thank you very much.

OHS Response

**Todd Lertjuntharangoon, Regional Program Manager
OHS**

I did want to take a quick moment to as best I can provide some responses, and maybe explore some avenues and how we can support Navajo Nation. Certainly, I understand that every one of our tribal programs has unique challenges, unique to their tribe, unique to their geographic area, and certainly I understand that the pandemic has exacerbated and added to those challenges. I do want to commend our programs at the same time because we've seen them pivot, and pivot rather well, to make sure that the most vital services are still connecting with children and families in their communities.

Certainly, we understand that program funding pivots with that, and those are larger pivots to make program-wide, and also without a whole lot of notice. I certainly understand that that's been the case for all of us the last year and a half. At the same time for OHS, I know we are a school readiness program, and our appropriation is really targeted at those costs, and in terms of our allowability and where we can allocate funds, it is guided by the statute that's in the Head Start Act.

One thing that I did want to say and encourage programs to do was, because a lot of our programs have not been operating at full capacity, one area where it certainly has impacted the majority of our programs, I would say, is in their staffing. Either in terms of not being fully staffed or staff schedules changing. We've seen a lot of programs have additional funding left over in their personnel line items because of the pandemic.

The first place I'd usually go to our programs and encourage them, when there are additional what we call one-time needs or needs that are not normal, ongoing costs, it could go to support things like technology and hardware to support remote accessibility, is to go there and to look at what your current budgets are, monitor those budgets, and if and where there can be excess or unobligated funds, to really work with your program specialist to look and see how we can then utilize that funding first to address some of those what we call, again, one-time costs.

I do think that it would be beneficial for us to have some individual conversations about that to look and see what flexibilities might be there, because those funds, while they may not be there to support all the items that you listed today, there may be some funds left there to support some of those bigger-priority areas. The Office of Head Start has worked really hard to be flexible with our programs over the last year and a half, including issuing fiscal flexibilities that are in effect through December 31st of this year, that are really meant to alleviate some of administrative burdens that our grant recipients normally would have to go through in order to reallocate funding and move funding.

Ms. Gonnig, if you have time, I think a separate conversation about that could be beneficial, and hopefully we can work together to address some of those areas. We may not be able to get to all of them, but I think we can probably target some of those and maybe address some of those with

currently existing funding, and then from there, look to see what other funding opportunities may be there to support some of the needs you identified.

Meaningful Consultation with Sovereign Nations

**Ned Norris, Chairman
Tohono O’odham Nation**

The Tohono O’odham Nation has been invited to comment during the upcoming tribal consultation on Tuesday, September 21, 2021, in alignment with Geographic Region IX. The Tohono O’odham Nation submits the following comments on how to better meet the needs of the Tohono O’odham Nation children and their families, taking into consideration of funding allocation and other issues affecting the delivery of Head Start services on the Tohono O’odham Nation.

The Tohono O’odham Nation is a federally recognized tribe in southern Arizona with over 35,000 enrolled tribal citizens. The Nation’s reservation, which consists of five non-contiguous areas located in Pima, Pinal, and Maricopa Counties, encompasses approximately 4,500 square miles of a mostly remote Sonoran Desert environment, with 62 miles of international border with Mexico. The political center of the Tohono O’odham Nation, Sells, AZ, where a majority of the governmental services are provided, is located almost 60 miles away from the nearest urban area. Additionally, the Tohono O’odham Nation consists of eleven political subdivisions known as districts, with over 66 rural and remote tribal communities.

There are seven Head Start Centers on the Tohono O’odham Nation, San Xavier Center (40 children); Sells Center (68 children); Pisinemo (20 children); Vaya Chin Center (20 Children); Santa Rosa Center (20 Children); North Komelik Center (20 Children); San Lucy Center (10 Children) and our Home Based option (17 children).

I. Tribal Head Start Overview

The Tohono O’odham Nation is honored to be part of the Head Start family since its inception in 1965. The Tohono O’odham Head Start Program has been the longest sustained program, within the Nation, focused on Education and Health through the family and community model infused with culturally appropriate instruction. The following are ongoing concerns we have on the Tohono O’odham Nation and recognize as shared issues among all tribal Head Start Programs through discussions with the National Indian Head Start Director’s Association (NIHSDA). Our Head Start Senior Program Manager is a board member of the NIHSDA and has identified these shared points of concern:

1. Cultural Teacher Qualifications

The current regulations for meeting the qualification requirements for education coordinators, teachers and teacher assistants will produce burdensome challenges for tribal programs.

The challenges for the Tohono O’odham Nation are:

- We would like the tribe to outline the qualification for cultural teachers, the current expectation is that all teachers have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. However, our cultural experts are elders, currently employed by our Head Start program. These cultural/language speakers are not interested and are unlikely to seek a degree to meet the teacher qualifications.
- We also do not have the resources to employ a third person in the classroom as a language and/or culture teachers.

The Tohono O'odham Nation recommends that the Office of Head Start:

- OHS should consider waiving the teacher qualifications for teaching staff so that Tribes can employ qualified (as determined by Tribes), and sometimes certified, language speakers and/or cultural transmitters in their Head Start programs.
- If tribes and states have established a program for certifying American Indian and Alaska Native speakers as qualified teachers, OHS should accept such individuals as meeting the teacher qualification requirements (Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington).

2. CLASS and Designation Renewal System

We have concerns regarding the cultural appropriateness and reliability to the Native American populations. Teachstone, the developers of CLASS, cannot provide research data on Native American Alaskan Native children to show cultural and behavioral norms or differences for the usage of CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System). There are "white-paper" references on the importance of cultural competency and respect, but no credible information on how CLASS influences tribal teachers or children.

The challenges for the Tohono O'odham Nation are:

- Exempt tribal grantees from CLASS until it has been tested and shown to be valid and reliable in AIAN populations.
- Currently, we are on a corrective action due to score at the bottom 10%. We are requesting additional training and technical assistance to ensure that teachers will receive additional training and resources to comply with current regulations.

The Tohono O'odham Nation makes the following recommendations:

- Eliminate the arbitrary 10% criteria of the CLASS evaluation system and its tie to the OHS self-imposed 25% goal in 1304.11 of the Head Start Performance Standards.
- Low CLASS threshold scores should be treated as non-compliance rather than a deficiency. OHS should then implement a follow-up review of CLASS.
- Identify and use proficient reviewers that demonstrate knowledge, expertise and experience in working with tribal populations and have demonstrated abilities to work with diverse cultural and ethnic populations.
- Provide additional resources and supports for bringing the tribal grantees up-to-speed on implementing and using CLASS. Additional funds to support the purchasing of CLASS

materials, attendance of training programs, and added additional funding to the CLASS contract for the logistics and facilitation of training events.

- Establish a formal grievance process for challenging CLASS evaluations not conducted appropriately.

3. Staff Qualifications - Professional Development:

Indian Head Start programs have great difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers and teacher aides. The Tohono O'odham Nation has several long-standing vacant positions due to unqualified applicants. We recently reclassified all teaching and specialist positions to ensure we comply with the Head Start Performance Standards. This pushes the program to seek additional funding to increase salaries.

The challenges for the Tohono O'odham Nation are:

- Difficulty in recruiting qualified applicants with an existing CDA, AA or BA in Early Childhood Education.
- Teachers earn required degrees and leave Head Start for other higher paying positions:

Head Start employees who obtain a degree are able to seek employment with the local school system or other early childhood programs for a higher paying wage. Due to inadequate funding levels, Tribal Head Start Programs are unable to compete with the wages that other schools and ECE programs can offer to employees. They are able to earn a higher wage with fewer requirements creating perpetual vacancies within the Head Start program.

- Funding to maintain qualified teaching staff:

The Head Start Act continues to increase the educational requirements for teaching staff but does not provide adequate funding levels to tribal programs that would allow programs to increase current wages to be competitive and to improve starting wages/wage scales of the program.

The Tohono O'odham Nation recommends that the Office of Head Start:

- Grant waivers for staff that do not meet the degree requirements until funding levels are increased to allow for competitive pay of qualified staff.
- Allow programs to renegotiate their cost per child to allow for the proper compensation and retention of qualified staff.

4. Administrative Error:

FY 2020 there was an administrative error that reduced our funding by 2 months and shorten our FY by 2 months.

The challenges for the Tohono O'odham Nation are:

- The new FY increased our salaries by 14 months. This required us to increase all of our Head Start employee's salaries from a 12 month to a 14-month expense.

- We were obligated to freeze positions due to less funding. The position freezes will directly affect our ability to provide quality services and make meeting program requirements more challenging.
- The increase of our salaries also forced a decrease for operational line items for FY 2022.

The Tohono O’odham Nation recommends that the Office of Head Start:

- Increase funding to ensure adequate funding is available for the entire fiscal year

III. Conclusion

The Tohono O’odham Nation will continue to exercise our efforts toward embedding our himdag, way of life, in the work we do for the education and well-being of our citizens. It is our hope for more opportunities to work with the Office of Head Start in our shared goals for the success of all of our students.

OHS Response

**Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager
OHS**

Thank you so much, Chairman. This is Todd Lertjuntharangool. We certainly do appreciate your testimony. And I certainly would if and when you can make time appreciate us making some time to maybe talk about these more in depth about how your program specifically and the Office of Head Start can work together to, I think, better support these areas and impact these areas. In hearing your testimony, one thing that I did want to share, and I also want to make clear that this is not approved as of yet, but many of you maybe have been aware or have read or seen the American Families Plan. Based on that plan from this administration, there is potential for some pretty significant updates in changes to the field of early childhood development, specifically around universal pre-K, additional funding for Head Start and childcare and additional funding to support staff salaries.

So one thing I think is important taking into consideration is that potential change and how that may impact current programs, not necessarily that we make plans or change anything about program operations currently, because like I said, that's not yet approved, but I think for the purpose of community planning and future planning, it's certainly something that we want to consider and be aware of.

Meaningful Consultation with Sovereign Nations

**Erika Tracy, Education Director
Hoopa Valley Tribe**

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Erica Tracy and I'm a citizen of the Hoopa Valley Tribe of far Northern California, and it's a great honor to represent our tribal leadership today. I'm very happy to see some familiar faces and names that I see on email threads all of the time so it's a pleasure being here. I currently serve as the Education Director for the Hoopa Valley Tribe, and I'm also the Executive Director of the Hoopa Tribal Education Association. As a chartered organization of the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council, it's our mission to provide a platform to span the entire education process, consisting with the values and sustainability of the tribe wherein our people are empowered to be responsible lifelong learners who realize their individual potential and contribute to the community as a whole. Therefore, the Hoopa Tribal Education Department and Association, we currently encompass 10 distinct department programs spanning educational services from tribal elders seeking higher education or vocational rehabilitation services to tribal children in utero through prenatal services to pregnant mothers through our Early Head Start programs.

And it is through our longstanding programs that are funded through the Office of Head Start that we've proudly served our community with Head Start programming for over 50 years, and Early Head Start Program for over 20 here in Hoopa. We very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in tribal consultation with Office of Head Start leadership, as we share our priorities, needs and experiences of the Hoopa Valley Tribe and our Early Head Start and Head Start programs. Our Hoopa Tribal Early Head Start and Head Start programs are 100% federally funded. And we currently serve 24 center-based children for 10 months to three years of age and 20 home based participants, eight prenatal women, 12 homebased children zero to three years of age and 52 center based children of preschool age as well as eight home based children between the ages of three and five. Last program year, we are funded to serve 112 children annually and just because of the fluctuation in circumstances of COVID and what have you, we ended up serving 137 children who are living here on our Hoopa Valley Reservation.

The program goals and objectives of our programs are developed in accordance with Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework, California State's early learning standards, desired results, developmental profile, Head Start Program Performance Standards, and the Head Start Program school readiness goals and objectives. And although we are trying our best to continue our services through a pandemic, through natural disasters in our area we're near and always kind of dealing with wildfire smoke and or threat in our community, we're still trying to provide the services to the best of our ability to the children and families that we serve. Like many of our other tribes who have provided testimony today, we would also recommend and advocate for increased funding amounts for our programs and for all of the various reasons that were stated previously. We are having a difficult time recruiting and retaining qualified staff and a great deal of that is directly correlated with the wages that we're able to offer currently.

So I'm hopeful that some of that funding may come down in the future to help offset some of that need in our community. As our staffing and our allocation comes down and we're trying to go with our funding to make sure that we have a substantial amount for our program operations, as well as our staffing, we are currently seeing increased rates of fringe benefits and even workers comp in our community as well and so that leads us to, as we're filing our grants, we're always

flagged when we're submitting anything that's saying we're approaching that 80% for allowable staff. We're well almost pushing 90% at this time where all of our current program funding is primarily geared towards staff, those qualified staff that we have to have, and then very bare bones for operational costs that will go for direct services to children. So looking at a reallocation or a new formula of some sort that can kind of meet us where we are and what our current needs are, is vital.

We've also as we're all required to do, trying to be as responsive to our community needs as possible and so through our community needs assessments and just the way that we have continued to operate with our community and our tribal needs first, we continue to operate above and beyond the required service hours that the Office of Head Start requires us to, but that is a community need. And so we are advocating and hopeful that at some point our funding will match the hours and the services that we are providing that are a direct result of what our community needs are. So for example, most of our classrooms are operating nine and a half hour days of service as opposed to six and a half. And we've tried to cut back here and there where we can, but we're still really seeing a financial need of increased allocation of funding. As you may or may not know the minimum wage requirement is also starting to be increased as well, and we're having a difficult time keeping up with that.

So I do want to just reiterate the new need for increased funding for staff salaries, especially with the heavy requirements that we place on our teachers. Another area that I'd like to speak to, and I think others have echoed it as well is just the need for language and cultural responsiveness. And knowing that the Office of Head Start absolutely values our language and cultural specificity that we can incorporate into our classrooms, but we have not had the opportunity to see funding to do that. For most of our programs that are focused on language revitalization or immersion efforts, we have to seek other funding through ACF, whether it be ANA or other small grants along the way to support those efforts and because it seems so correlated with Office of Head Start goals, especially for school readiness, we know that their minds are sponges at that age and they're able to really take on the language and it will totally set them up for when they transition to PreK-12 school systems.

So finding a way for Office of Head Start to support those efforts financially would also you a great benefit and the same reason of just recruiting qualified staff to be able to help us do that as it is a priority of our Education Department, our board and our council. One other area, well, not just one, but a few other areas that were kind of spoken about in the last round of tribal consultation, but I think are still areas that I'm hearing kind of as a recurring theme from many testimonies today is our internet infrastructure, as well as our facility infrastructures. Like I mentioned, our programs are very longstanding, and our building is also very longstanding. That being said, facilities, funding and infrastructure would be ideal for us. There's always repairs, always maintenance and thankfully with some of the ARP funding and the CARES funding that came down, we've been able to do that, but there's still so many more repairs that need to be done.

Additionally, as many or programs I'm sure have wait lists for center-based services, we do as well, and we have hit our capacity as far as the current facility structures that we have. So as

much as we would love to bring more children into our center, we do not have the physical space to do so. So, with infrastructure funding, that would allow us to provide more services that are a community need here in Hoopa. I think one other aspect of funding is... Not so much funding as much as assistance and guidance is just like we are seeing the turnover in our staffing, in our classroom staffing, we're seeing it at every level of our over overarching departments. We're seeing it in our Fiscal Department, we're seeing it in our Tribal Government, we're seeing it everywhere where there's so much turnover happening.

One request is just to figure out how to have like a reoccurring training system, and I know that that's embedded and it's a requirement for performance standards that we have, but it's not happening fast enough for us at this point because we have so much staff turnover and even at the fiscal level, especially, as much as we're trying to find ways and are appreciative of some of the administrative burden to have some flexibilities at this time, our Fiscal Department is not up to speed with that. So we're having some struggles there sometimes that I think could be alleviated by some additional kind of consistent, reoccurring technical assistance or training for all layers and partners and people that make our Head Start and Early Head Start programs function.

Our Childcare Partnership was something that we would love to come back to if that's a possibility. As I mentioned, our current funding, it's a 100% for Early Head Start and Head Start programs and we know that there was a time where Childcare Partnership funding was available, and though that may have come and gone, and we're working through our state agencies to access that, finding a way to make that accessible to tribal governments again, I think would be ideal and a way that we can continue to ensure that we're providing culturally responsive and language revitalization effort focused programming to all of our early childhood programs, not just those children that are currently enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start programs that are through the tribe. That also brings me to cross systems of collaboration. I know that that's a heavy ask of Office of Head Start and something that we do through all of our partnership agreements and really working hard to work closely with our medical centers, with our school districts, with different consultants and what have you to ensure that we're providing the best services to our children and families, however, that very seldom comes with funding to do so. So if there was an opportunity to provide additional funding to ensure that those collaborations can happen, that would be ideal. So for example, mental health, that's always something that we struggle with. We are in very rural Northern California. There is a shortage of different consultants and clinicians that can come and give us and our children those supports that they need. So finding ways or additional funding to be able to support some of those requirements or even incentivize partners to collaborate with us, I think would be ideal.

Similar to cross systems of care, one other thing that I wanted to leave you all with and that I hope will come forward in funding at some point, is that in 2019, our Hoopa Valley Tribal Council did approve a resolution and it is recognizing the effectiveness of culturally relevant trauma responsive practices and approaches and educational services, programming efforts and initiatives in the Hoopa Valley. And we have been doing quite a bit of work as it pertains to adverse childhood experiences, recognizing impacts of trauma, be it historical, intergenerational,

family, whatever kind of aspect it's coming into, we're seeing it in our children. And so what are ways that we can build resiliency in our children, and because that has become such an apparent indicator of how we can better support our children and families and how we can better prepare them as they transition into the PK-12 system.

We're hopeful that Office of Head Start will also recognize the importance of that and that does have a very strong component of cross systems of collaboration, as we already try to do with the Office of Head Start funding that we have in collaborating with other programs, whether it be Human Services or Kamal Medical Center, we just would really like to see funding follow that mandate as well and kind of continue that work that we are doing. I think in general, just more funding. I think that that's the basic ask of our tribal council to see how we can continue to provide quality services for our children and families that we're currently serving. And also finding ways to think about the future and expanding those services beyond what we're able to provide today.

OHS Response

**Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager
OHS**

Well, first off, Ms. Trace, I do want to say thank you for your testimony and thank you so much for the specificity of your testimony. And I ask that you give my best to the team there, the Head Start Program. I did have the privilege to visit the community. It might have been 2014, 2015, and it certainly was one of the more beautiful places of the country that I've had the privilege to visit, although it was one of the scarier places to get to because of the cliffs and the mountains, and the fact that I think the speed limit says 30, but nobody does 30 around those cliffs but I certainly hope to be able to visit the community again. To come back to your testimony, I think the scenario that you presented is one that I don't want to say that we see often, but is the minority of the ones that we see where the program is serving more kids than what they're actually funded to serve. Certainly, I want to commend that Hoopa Valley Tribe for doing that and wanted to make sure that those for families that are in need and eligible for Head Start services are connected with those services and service providers. And in a scenario like yours, one thing that I do want to recommend and certainly recommend for other folks listening in is from time to time, there is funding available to expand programs and to serve additional unserved families. I know that last year, I think it was around end of summer or fall, we had run a notice of funding opportunity, and we awarded, I believe there's only... It might have been less than half of what was available at that time.

We will be moving to post another notice of funding opportunity possibly this fall, maybe this winter, Mrs. Pinckney probably knows better than I do at the timeframe, but that's the first thing that I would want you to be aware of is that the opportunity likely will be coming in the next couple of months for those programs who are at capacity, but still have unmet need to request additional funding to serve those unserved families so that would be my first recommendation there. You know what, additionally, I think for a lot of our programs what we see, especially as a

result of the pandemic, is them not able to actually serve the number of children that they're funded for.

In certain cases, when that goes on for a certain number of time, we really do have to look at what that age income eligible population is that is not already served by another program or another provider, and really come back to drawing board and see, and make sure that our program is aligned to meet with current need is, and that we're really designing a program that I think maximizes quality within the federal funding amount that is available. Like I said, your scenario is certainly different than that one. And so in regard to additional funding, as I stated before, that American Families Plan is something that is on the horizon. I think it's something that folks are eagerly anticipating some type of confirmation on, but that to my knowledge, Ms. Wanderski who is on, and Ms. Pinckney may have a better idea, but to my knowledge, that is as far as what within view, the next opportunity for a significant increase in the field of early child development.

So I definitely encourage everybody to monitor that closely and certainly we will, as information is provided to us, make sure that our programs are aware of it as well, so as best we can get that information to you guys in a timely manner so that you can act on it. In regard to your facility and the infrastructure. As I said it before, one thing we really have been working on programs with, is to utilize all the federal funding and not end the year with an obligated fund. On the federal funding and not end the year with an obligated fund. Certainly, it's unfortunate that it does happen, but it does happen. And when it does happen, that funding, usually we make it available to other programs for what we call one-time funding. And those are normally costs that are not what we would consider ongoing operation costs. It may be things like, we need a new bus and maybe things like we need the sidewalk renovated outside. And in some cases, it may be facilities. In the past the Office of Head Start, while we do not receive a facility-specific appropriation from Congress, we have through one-time funding been able to support several of our programs with either purchasing, or constructing, or doing a major renovation for a facility. So, I encourage you definitely to work with your Program Specialist to inquire about that. And it is a process that involves submitting a funding application along with what we refer to as a 1303 pre-approval checklist, which is just a number of documents that support the request itself.

I do want to also state that one-time funding is not guaranteed. It's contingent upon the availability of funds and of course that availability is something that we will call not to have, but it still does happen. So in the event that it does, we hope that it's a benefit to another program that does have a one-time need. And hopefully we can have some additional conversations around that and maybe a combination of those different things might help to offset some of what that ongoing cost is. Additionally, we understand, especially in your part of the country, the rise and the cost of operation, not just in terms of staff salaries and on wage compatibility for the field, but in terms of just inflation overall and the cost to operate a Head Start classroom and so nationally, I would go as far to say this, that I certainly wished that funding was able to keep up with inflation, obviously inflation, it varies from year to year. But in certain cases, it does really require our programs to come back to the drawing board and make some larger, harder decisions about what they can operate.

That's a tough place to come to, but also when the programs do get to that point, it's something that we are committed to supporting them with the planning of that. So hopefully, like I said, we can have some additional conversations in the future, but I appreciate your testimony and the specificity of it. And for making time to join us today. Thank you so much Ms. Tracy.

**Shawna Pinckney, Acting Deputy Director
OHS**

Todd, this is Shawna. If I could just add, also Ms. Tracy, I really enjoyed listening to your testimony. Thank you so much for sharing it. You mentioned in particular, the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership funding, we've received that funding through appropriations. We're in our fourth round of that. We recently posted a competition for that funding as well. And I would imagine or would anticipate the availability of those funds through our appropriation would continue. So as soon as we get our new annual appropriation, I would encourage you to take a peek at that, to see if there's funding in there. And then the next step for us would be to make that funding available through the posting of a funding opportunity and the best resource to find information on the date for the posting and the size of the pot of funds that would be available for our AIAN grantees would be grants.gov. If you're not already registered there, that's absolutely the best resource for staying abreast of the upcoming opportunities.

Meaningful Consultation with Sovereign Nations (Cont.)

**Lucy Oquilluk,
Kawerak, Inc.**

Lucy Oquilluk: Okay. Hello, I'm Lucy Oquilluk. I am from the native village of Mary's Igloo. Can you hear me okay? Okay. Dear US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start leadership, and leadership of Tribal governments. Thank you for the work you do in the early childhood field. And thank you for the opportunity to share today. Kawerak has been a Region 11 AIAN recipient of Office of Head Start funding since 1979. Thank you. Kawerak, Inc. is the regional non-profit Tribal consortia serving 20 Alaska native tribes in the Bering Straits region of Alaska, covering an area over 26,000 square miles, about the size of West Virginia. Of the many services we provide, one is Head Start services to about 240 children in our region in Nome, as the hub and 10 outlying rural village communities. We are grateful for the funds received through the Office of Head Start, which has made it possible to meet the AIAN birth to five-year-old children and family needs. Following are the five areas where we find our programs need support based on what parents and Tribal leaders in our communities are requesting.

Number one, language revitalization. 95% of our young families use English only in the home, at work, and at school. Most of our children under 18 only know a few sentences or words in our native language. We have three Alaska native languages, Inupiaq, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, sometimes called Siberian Yupik by other outside our region. And Central Yupik, are declining in our Bering Straits region, due to the decrease in Alaska native language speakers. Public

school systems and current employers in the region exclusively use the English language. Many young Alaska native families have only partial use of our native languages and rely on elders for this knowledge. Many of our elders are passing and younger Alaska native families are realizing the importance of maintaining our Alaska native language. As languages lost in our region, cultural identity is also declining. In recent years, the negative attitudes that elders and Alaska native people in general felt for speaking their native language is changing.

Now, parents and elders are wishing to see their Alaska native language passed on to current and future generations. Recognizing this need, we seek financial support to make language revitalization possible in our region to strengthen self and community identity again. We recognize the need for training funds. So, our teaching staff can participate in Alaska native language courses and opportunities together. Our staff will be able to consistently work toward language proficiency, so they, themselves, can begin to speak in native language sentences and begin having abstract conversations with others, and teach their own students what they are learning. So, they too can speak and understand their native languages. We also recognize the need to hire fluent native language speakers and knowledge barriers to mentor to our teaching staff and students who are learning their native languages together. We ask that the Office of Head Start considering how funds can be made available specifically for native revitalization initiatives that will take years to see the end result of.

Tachini Pete Salish/Navajo, who is the current technical assistant director at the Native Language Community Coordination T/TA Center, estimates it takes a minimum of 2000 hours on a language learning path before someone can begin to become proficient in our new language. We ask that the Office of Head Start considering how to support this positive life changing initiative. Number two, new Head Start facilities. Kawerak owns 5 of the 11 facilities that we offer Head Start services in. By the end of 2022, we anticipate being moved into a brand-new facility in the community of Shishmaref, thanks to the Office of Head Start funds awarded to do so. Were so excited and thank you. We still have a need to build new facilities and four more of our remote sites, where our spaces that we rent do not have the space we need to meet the growing number of students applying to our programs. And do not allow us to consider expanding to offer Head Start services or the spaces are over 50 to 60 years old and threatened to present health and safety concerns.

Our 5,247 square foot Shishmaref facility is costing approximately 8.7 million to build due to the remoteness of our communities. Everything costs more to do when doing it in remote Alaska. We ask that the Office of Head Start continuing to consider how to make new facility funds available. We also recommend that when facility funds are awarded, that they be issued with their own grant numbers to be spent within three to five years. We have run into issues where the spending the Shishmaref Head Start facility funds within the grant cycle. It was awarded as we were in the final year of our grant cycle. We needed and are still in need of more time to complete our project. Number three, routine facility maintenance. We are finding that our annual budget limits what we can do with preventative ongoing and emergency facility maintenance. For example, our program is in need of a standby generator for when the power goes out, and the temperature's 30 below zero.

Currently, we have no means of providing alternative heat to keep our water and sewage systems from cracking due to frozen pipes, which is reoccurring issue in any given facility, every winter. Due to our remoteness, we are frequently unable to utilize the limited skilled professionals in our region to do plumbing, electrical, and boiler work. We frequently need contracts with professionals from Anchorage to fly to Nome by jet, and a small plane to our village sites. We ask that the Office of Head Start considering how to make routine facility maintenance funds available to programs so small projects and initiatives can be planned over time. We recognize that one-time funding opportunities are available annually. However, we are finding these limited opportunities are not enough to meet our needs.

Number four, understanding the cost per child in remote Alaska. We currently applied for Early Head Start expansion funds in two of our Head Start communities but did not receive them due to the high cost per child. This is extremely disheartening as we are in desperate need of expanding our services to birth to 2-year children. We simply cannot run our Early Head Start program with the current cost per child Head Start threshold. We could pay teacher wages and nothing more. Food utilities or rent program supplies, etc. With the current cost per child threshold, additionally, potential community partners do not have funds to offer an in-kind contribution, where in rural Alaska asks that the Office of Head Start take the time to consider the true cost per child in a classroom of eight Early Head Start students, three teachers in a full-time day in our region.

Number five, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership parent income considerations. It normally operates the one and only childcare center in our community of 4,000 people. Working families are desperate for any kind of safe, reliable, and full-time childcare, which we offer. Families who are accepted into our program are eligible for state and Tribal childcare assistance but make too much to be eligible for our program according to the Office of Head Start income thresholds. We are constantly finding ourselves on the verge of accepting more than 49% over income families we are allowed to accept as a Tribal program. The only way families would be eligible is if they quit their jobs, but they would no longer be eligible for our program because they are not working families. Parents are caught in a loop that does not allow them to improve their family's economic situation in our high cost of living community. They desperately need our services.

We ask the Office of Head Start to consider more lenient income thresholds or allow flexible eligibility reasons in Early Head Start and Child Care partnership programs, where we would still follow our eligibility criteria and serve those with the highest eligibility points first. Thank you for giving Kawerak Incorporated the opportunity to share our needs for your consideration to improve student and family support services in our region. We are extremely grateful that our children and families are consistent, safe, and nurturing environments. To learn and grow, we are able to offer support while families are their first teacher. Thank you. Sincerely, Lucy Oquilluk, Kawerak board member in the native village of Mary's Igloo.

OHS Response

**Todd Lertjuntharangool, Regional Program Manager
OHS**

This is Todd. First off, thank you so much, Ms. Oquilluk for providing that testimony on behalf of Kawerak. I appreciate your time. Additionally, I want to recognize that Ms. Trowbridge is on. And I want to also think Ms. Trowbridge for inviting me out to see the program. I think it was back in 2019. And certainly because of that visit this testimony certainly hits a completely different place because without having visited, I would never have known the vast geographic area that Kawerak, Inc. serves. I'll say without a doubt that the communities you serve and the community out in Shishmaref is the most geographically isolated, the most remote communities that I've visited anywhere in the United States. And so certainly I want to do all we can to support you and I certainly understand that because of that geographic isolation and because of that broad geographic area that you serve, it presents a very, very unique challenge for you guys implementing services there in Alaska.

One thing I certainly want to bring up, especially in your community and the various communities that you serve and populations that you serve. I certainly agree with the putting a big emphasis on language revitalization. One thing that I know the Office of Head Start is considering right now is, I know that there is a partnership focused on language that the Administration for Native Americans is involved in with the Bureau of Indian Education. And they recently come to the Office of Head Start and asked us if we could be a part of that and we could support that. And so, we're currently discussing that across those agencies right now, to see how the Office of Head Start to support that effort. And I believe it's one that certainly would be relevant to you and your communities there. So hopefully we can see some tangible outcomes as a result of that work.

In terms of your facilities, and in terms of your requests for issuing separate grants, I am happy to say that we all moving to now issue facility awards in their own separate grant. That way it provides additional flexibility to manage that one award separately outside of your existing Head Start grant or grants. And it doesn't necessarily confine them to that exact fiscal period or that project period and so certainly for you all, it is one thing that I know is necessary because I know your window for construction is so small. I know that the ability to get supplies out to actually build and construct is extremely limited, I think, and Deb and Ms. Oquilluk can correct me if I'm wrong. It's something like two weeks or two months of the year that you have that window to get it done. And if you miss that window, you can wait again to the next season, until ice thaws and to get barges out there. And so, I certainly understand that.

I think that five-year grant separate for the facilities, hopefully will support you guys in the future projects, should you be awarded with some ability to work around that. I can't say I know, but I can only imagine what that does to cost. And what that does to cost to build out there and also to operate out there and so additionally, I would say that if I know, I believe, you guys have other populations that can be served. I know you mentioned that you had come in for expansion, but hopefully there will be another opportunity for expansion, like I said, this fall and this winter.

If that's something you all still are interested in and you guys have additional families that you could serve. But definitely when we talk about flexibility, I know Kawerak has kind of a league of their own because of your operation. And again, I just want to thank Deb personally for flying me out to all these different communities and showing me really firsthand what that means.

Without that, I'd never really could have imagined what you were talking about when you say things like remote. And when you say things like barging in equipment. We appreciate the testimony provided by Kawerak. Thank you all so much.

So one thing I did want to say before we move to close, is normally the Office of Head Start, we worked to try to get formal summaries out of consultation with those formal responses out within about 45 days of the close of consultation. So, we'll be, immediately, once we wrap up this session, working to get the transcripts and get those down to a good summary. And then we make those available through the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website. And also, at the request of the NIHSDA board, what we're doing now is, when those become available, we just go ahead and e-blast those out to Tribal leaders across the country, and to our Head Start directors, just so that we make sure that those summaries are available to you all.

I want to, again, thank everybody who took the time today. I know that everybody is extremely busy. I know that the pandemic and where we are right now has added an extreme amount of additional work for our directors out there and for our programs. I want to thank you all for the work that you continue to do day in and day out for Tribal kids and families. And I also want to just say that I wish and pray for all you to have a warm and safe fall season and winter season. And hopefully we'll be seeing you again at our November conference. For any Tribal leaders who were not able to provide testimony today or in our past sessions, again, we'll be having that last session on Monday, November 15th. We hope to take in good testimony there as well, so that we can use that for our future year. With that, I'll transition it back over to our Acting Deputy Director, Ms. Pinckney, to close us out.

Closing

In closing remarks, Shawna Pinckney thanked participants for the opportunity to hear directly from tribal leadership to better understand the challenges programs are facing. Ms. Pinckney also thanked participants for their suggestions on OHS can continue to support programs through the challenges they are faced with.