

Written Statements Provided to the House General Government Appropriations
Subcommittee for the Hearing Held on February 26, 2026

Chair Kuhn and Members of the General Government Committee

Michigan House of Representatives

Subject:.Testimony.in.support.to.not.release.Michigan.Indian.Boarding.School.Report

Aanii Boozhoo Chair Kuhn and fellow Members of the Committee,

My name is Meredith Migizi. I am a tribal citizen of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, a fourth-generation boarding school student, and a resident of Northern Michigan. I serve as the Director of Miigwech Inc., a tribally incorporated 501c3 with no oversight from any tribal council, and I am a facilitator of the Zagaswe'iwei Council a healing council for Holy Childhood Boarding School Survivors. I am here today to provide written testimony regarding the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study because it directly impacts my community, my ancestors, my children, and my fellow Michigan citizens.

My testimony is based off the Bridge Michigan's online release of the MDCR report. I want to note this has had negative impacts on my tribal community, and should not have been released.

I am writing to respectfully urge you to reject the current report in its entirety and to direct the Michigan Department of Civil Rights not to release it to the public. While I support the original intent of this study, the product delivered does not meet the requirements set forth in the Request for Proposal, and its release in its current form will adversely impact my tribal community by perpetuating exploitive trauma narratives without the foundational research that was promised.

The report produced by MDCR does not meet the RFP guidelines, which called for exploratory and preliminary research regarding the state's involvement in the U.S. Federal Indian Boarding School policy. It appears that no actual archival research was performed. Instead, this report reads like a literature review or a wiki page, littered with exploitive trauma narratives at the hands of the contractors and the MDCR lead. The original RFP required researchers to "locate, analyze, and preserve records," yet it appears that no evidence of this critical work was never done in the report.

First, the report's methodology was fundamentally flawed and disrespectful to our community. The contractors administered surveys to collect trauma narratives from survivors and descendants. This was unnecessary and harmful.

Our communities have already shared our stories—we have interviews, written testimonies, and video recordings that could have and should have been utilized for that purpose. The body of literature documenting these abuses already exists.

The victims surveyed by the contractor did not need to relive those experiences again for this report to be done correctly. We didn't need to be surveyed and re-traumatized for the state to understand what happened. What we needed—and what Michiganders were promised—was for the state to open its own archives and examine its own records to determine the degree of state's role in these atrocities. That work was never done.

It to be clear, its not a question of whether state was involved with these children it is what degree. In my work at Miigwech Inc., I have personal knowledge of individual alive today who speaks of never being able to come home because they were place by the state with white families every summer. Even though they was told they would be able to come home. Their story is not the only one.

Second, the report fails to examine Michigan's role in the broader system of Native child removal. These schools became funnels to the foster care system. Because it appears no archive review was performed by the contractor, there is no documentation of the state's role in what is called the "Sixties Scoop" in which native children were take from homes that wanted them into white foster care families. The "Sixties Scoop" that led to the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

It appears no data was collected regarding the number of Native children removed by the state to the Department of Human Services or Child Protective Services. It appears there is no data about the unwed mother homes where the state removed children from their mothers. The Archives of Michigan hold extensive records from the Michigan State Department of Social Welfare—records that appear to never be consulted. How can we claim to have studied this history without examining the very documents that would reveal the state's involvement?

Third, the report omits critical documentation of specific state agency actions that require archival evidence. There is no mention of the Health Department's role in addressing illness outbreaks at these institutions. There is no mention of doctors or their licensing for those who may have performed sterilizations on children. If children died at these schools—and we know they did—where are the state death certificates documenting causes of death? The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe has documented that 229 students

died at the Mt. Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School between 1893 and 1934, yet only five of those deaths were officially documented by the school. State death certificates would exist. State health department records would exist. They were simply never examined.

Fourth and I feel most important, the report's focus on the 12 federally recognized tribes creates a false and incomplete picture that excludes countless Michigan Native people who attended these schools. Many of the 12 federally recognized tribes—including my own and others like the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, Little River Band and the Match-e-be-nash-wish Band—did not receive federal recognition until the 1990s. The Nottawaseppi Huron Band, for example, was not federally recognized until 1995, after first seeking recognition before 1935 and being denied.

This matters because the boarding school era operated from the late 1800s through the 1980s—decades before these tribes had any official federal recognition status. How are tribal children from this period being included in the study when their tribes were not "officially recognized" at the time they attended these schools? How are their descendants—many of whom are citizens of these now-recognized tribes—being represented in a study that only looks at the 12 current federally recognized tribes?

Furthermore, archival records from the Mt. Pleasant Indian School documents students from a wide range of tribal affiliations, including many whose communities may not correspond neatly to today's federally recognized tribes. The school's student case files include applications, medical records, and correspondence documenting children from various bands and communities across Michigan and the great lakes. The study's narrow focus excludes these children and their descendants entirely.

The report also fails to include the Mackinac Band, who held the first boarding school on their lands. It excludes tribal nations that were forcefully removed from their lands and placed in Michigan boarding schools—whose descendants may now be enrolled in tribes outside Michigan or may not be enrolled in any federally recognized tribe at all. And there is no documentation of the children trafficked to Michigan from Canada's First Nations—children who died on Michigan soil and whose deaths should be documented in Michigan records.

The consulting firm, Kauffman and Associates, has stated they had "significant ethical concerns" about the editing of the report, alleging they were asked to cut an initial 350-page report to 50 pages and eliminate references to local government involvement—accusing the state of "whitewashing" the findings. The firm's CEO stated they remain committed to "solutions that support transparency and accuracy, without whitewashing,

sanitizing, or misrepresenting the experiences of Native American boarding school survivors." This is precisely what the current report does: it sanitizes the state's role while exploiting survivor trauma to fill the gaps.

It is deeply concerning that the Department of Civil Rights has reportedly declined to testify, citing "potential litigation." Our communities deserve answers. Michigan taxpayers spent over \$1 million on a study that was supposed to document abuses and deaths of Native American children over more than a century, and to determine the extent to which the State of Michigan and local municipalities were involved in this tragedy. My tribal relations who participated deserve to have respect, not exploitation of their trauma.

I respectfully request that this subcommittee take the following actions:

Direct the Department of Civil Rights not to release the current report in any form. Release would cause active harm to tribal communities of Michigan by disseminating exploitive trauma narratives presented as "findings" without the foundational archival research that was promised and paid for.

Withhold any further funding for this project until a new scope of work is developed in genuine consultation with all affected tribal communities. This consultation must include:

- Urban Native populations, including the approximately 63,000 Native Americans in Wayne County and Kent County's approximate 42,000.
- Tribally-recognized tribal nations and bands that do not currently have federal recognition including but not limited to Grand River, Burt Lake and Mackinac Bands
- Tribal nations whose ancestors were forcibly removed from Michigan lands but are now enrolled elsewhere
- Descendant communities whose tribes received recognition after the boarding school era
- First Nations communities from Canada whose children were trafficked to Michigan schools
- Michigan's 12 Federally recognized tribes

Require that any future research prioritize archival investigation over community surveys. Our testimonies already exist. What we need is for the state to examine its own records—state death certificates, health department reports, social welfare case files, child protective services records, and unwed mother home admissions—to document the state's role with evidence, not just narrative.

Remove the MDCR from the project, and direct the DHHS to lead with appropriate funds. Have DHHS conduct the archival research that was originally required and to provide regular updates to tribal communities and Michiganders on the documents located and the findings emerging from those records. It is beyond me how this was under the supervision of the MDCR when the state's involvement is rooted in foster care, adoption, removal and health issues- it should have always been held in the DHHS.

Attorney General Dana Nessel has opened a criminal investigation into boarding school abuses, modeled after the clergy abuse investigation. That is welcome news. But a criminal investigation requires evidence—archival records, death certificates, licensing documents, and case files—not trauma narratives extracted through surveys. Releasing the current report would undermine that investigation by substituting documentation with exploitation.

Our ancestors, our survivors, and our children deserve better than this. Michiganders deserve a study that actually does what it promised: to locate, analyze, and preserve the records that document the state's role. Survivors and Descendants deserve to have their existing testimonies honored by being paired with the evidence that proves what they lived through. No Michigander deserves to have their trauma repackaged and released as a substitute for the real work that was never done.

Thank you for your time, for holding this hearing, and for the opportunity to provide public comment on this critical matter. I urge you to reject this report and to ensure that any future work on this issue is done with, by, and for our communities—not to us.

Chi-miigwech (Thank you),

Meredith Migizi

Director, Miigwech Inc.

Citizen, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

Hello, My name is Debra Delk and I am a Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indian. As far as I know I am the second generation of Holy Childhood. I went in 1964 (2nd grade) to 1970 (7th grade) Six years of pure hell! We all were told everyday we would amount to nothing or nobody! We were also told nobody wanted us, not even our parents. Which I started to believe! Since one summer my mother didn't come to get us. Which she couldn't since she landed in prison. We had no idea! So finally after 2 weeks my aunt & step uncle came.

Besides the mental abuse we dealt with physical abuse also. Which for me was many beatings and kneeling outside of the nuns bedroom door. Either on rice or a broom stick! And sometimes the nun either forgot I was there or just didn't care! But the worst for me was telling us about the bear walk! And chasing us around the dormitory, dressed as bears. When I was finally able to leave that hell hole. I didn't want anything to do with my culture. Let alone meeting another Native American or going to Pow Wows. I wasn't involved in my culture until I was in my early 30's. I had to deprogram my mind from everything I was taught there... Which took many years! My children also suffered due to the trauma of that hell hole. This is just a few things we as children endured. I could tell you things that make your hair curl! But I'd have to write a book.

Thank you, & Sincerely

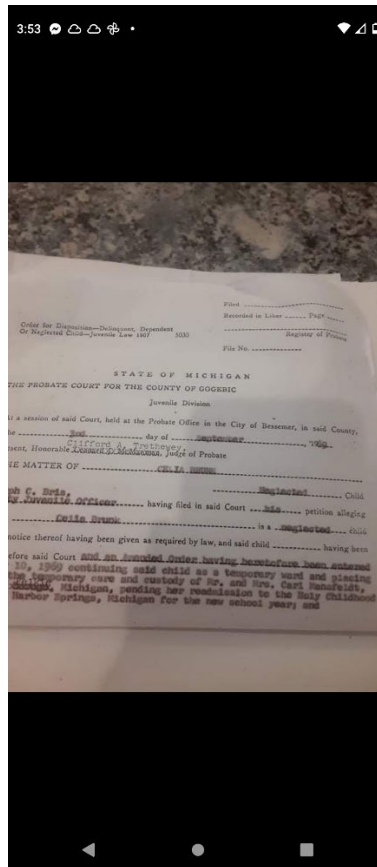
Debra Delk

Dear Sir: My English name is Linda Cobe. My story is familiar and similar to many Indigenous people across the country. My Indian name was taken from me when I was forcibly sent to Holy Childhood, as well as my Native tongue, my clothes, diet, spirituality, home, and most importantly, the warm arms of my mother and father. I am a proud tribal citizen and Elder of the Lac Vieux Desert Tribe. Our tribe was one of the last to be found, referred to as "The Lost Tribe," in 1939. During the 1950s and 1960s, every school-aged child from our small Village in Watersmeet, Mi. was taken. I am a Survivor of Boarding School,(sent at age 5 for 1 year,) a 60s Scoop Survivor, (adopted out to a White family in 1967, under the failed INDIAN ADOPTION PROJECT 1958-1967, pre-ICWA) and Survivor of Sexual Assault, (perpetrator was adoptive father, now deceased).The adoptive family also adopted my sister who also was sexually abused in this home for years, until 1978, when ICWA became law, she spoke her truth, was removed, and placed in a Native Home. No charges were ever filed against the perpetrator. As a 5 year old child, forced into a foreign environment, with strict rules that if broken we faced severe punishment. Forced to perform as if we were in the military and beaten, slapped, kicked, called everything that was dehumanizing, and had religion shoved down our throats. All communication was cut off from our family, we had no one to tell or turn to, we just had to take it. We had to take the abuse, told almost daily how worthless we were and our Indian way of life was from the devil, we cried ourselves to sleep, holding ourselves in a fetal position, with broken hearts that ached with loneliness. They shamed us and took away any resemblance

of our Native identity, our spirits were broken. Let's call it what it is, CULTURAL GENOCIDE, a War on Children. How do you destroy a People? You come for their children. While we cried every night in the dormitories, back home at the Village, the silence was deafening as no little children were heard running around laughing and playing, only the sounds of mothers wailing for their children and heartbroken fathers devastated that they could not protect their families. Alcohol filled the hole left by the federal government's policy of assimilation, the state's complicity in the enactment of boarding school, right down to county governments and local organizations. The feds may have provided funding (stolen from our trust land monies) to the schools, but the states provided enforcement, (attachment of State of Mich, Gogebic County, Probate Court, 1968, my sister Celia Brunk, in foster care, court ordered to attend Holy Childhood for the school year) some law enforcement was involved in picking up the runaways and bringing them back to the schools, as well as the local organizations that assisted in fund raising events where Native children performed for White audiences like monkeys in a zoo. In my immediate family, 2 older brothers both attended Holy Childhood, one committed suicide at age 25 and the other in a fatal car crash at age 27, both alcohol related. My younger sister Celia attended Holy Childhood walked on just after becoming an Elder at 57, unable to enjoy years with her grandchildren. Our youngest sister, raised in Milwaukee did not attend boarding school but grew up without her siblings, also Walked on at the young age of 53. I have a half sister that I am estranged, but she also attended Holy Childhood and is elderly in poor health. I'm the last in my family and have a responsibility to be their voice as they never had the opportunity to tell their truths. But as many, they never shared much, too much trauma to relive. We lost our entire childhood, came together as adults, only for our reunion to be short lived. I've suffered my own personal crisis' and chronic stress in my life and am on a journey to try to heal from that past. Unfortunately I've passed this trauma onto my children and grandchildren who know very little of their Native ancestry and culture because I did not know. It is a long road back. Years at boarding school did not make us White, we are still brown-skinned, dark hair, dark eyes, just as the Creator intended. Most disgraceful is the lack of accountability from the Churches. No words can describe their hypocrisy, cruelty, inhumane treatment of the Native children, some of whom Never. Came. Home. Where are the records of these deaths listing numbers and manner of deaths. We all know the schools had cemeteries. This 150 year dark history has been buried for so long with no justice to victims. In 2026, the Trump administration continues to try to bury the truth, more white- washing because the Truth disparages America, in their view. Canada has come clean, their history is being told, reparations have occurred, it is never too late to do what is right. We are the last generation to have attended, when we are gone, and we are losing our Survivors every year, our stories/truths, first-hand accounts, will be gone. There are great disparities between Indigenous populations and the rest of the country as we lag behind in

longevity, health, income, education, etc. I fear we will not live to see justice or receive compensation for a lifetime of trauma and loss, emotional scars that need healing, as we struggle to reclaim our identity. I fear those most responsible are looking for any and every excuse from; Statute of Limitations, to perpetrators being deceased, to no witnesses, no evidence other than testimony, and now a failed million dollar study, all tools in the toolboxes of federal, state, and local entities to avoid any liabilities. We deserve better, we deserve justice, we deserve apologies with actions such as monetary reparations, repatriations, policy changes, etc. to live out the last of our years in comfort and healing. Does Trump's "Golden Era," only apply to the rest of the country? I feel Boarding School Survivors are excluded from many policy decision making processes while being a necessary and important voice that needs to be heard. Many Survivors choose not to discuss their experience and that needs to be respected. But there are many of us out there sharing our truths to whom will listen and the feedback is always the same, the public wants to know the truth.

Thank you for your attention, Linda Raye Cobe



it appearing to said Court, after a full investigation of the facts and circumstances, that said -----
----- Celia Brunk ----- is a ----- neglected -----
child ----- and was of the age of 8 years on the ----- 5th ----- day of
----- August -----, 1969-----

And it further appearing that the public interests and the interests of said child ----- will be
best subserved thereby;

IT IS ORDERED, That said Celia Brunk ~~be and she is hereby retained as a~~
~~temporary ward of Probate Court, and that she be released from the tem-~~
~~porary care and custody of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Mansfeldt, Box ~~100~~, ~~Boonville~~~~
~~Michigan; and~~

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, That said Celia Brunk be and she is hereby
placed in the temporary care and custody of the Holy Childhood School,
Harbor Springs, Michigan to provide her with special schooling, effec-
tive as of September 3, 1969, until the further Order of this Court,
and that the Holy Childhood School, Harbor Springs, Michigan be paid
the sum of \$2.00 per day for board and care, in addition to clothing
and incidental expenses for said child through the Child Care Fund of
this Court.

CLIFFORD A. TRETHERWEY
JUDGE OF PROBATE.

Clifford A. Trethewey
Judge of Probate

A TRUE COPY
Leona Reporaro
REGISTER OF PROBATE
DATE Sept. 3, 1969

I am sending this letter in regards to the boarding school report, in regard towards the Kaufman report.

I did not do the report because of Aaron Payment, as a former chairman for the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians...I reached out to him to see what he could do to help myself and other survivors, with funding to support us with traveling, to help us with advocacy work.... I never heard from him...this was a few years ago....

The next time I heard from him, he showed up at a meeting, at the Pokagon community myself and 7 other survivors were speaking to....

Aaron Payment, had set up tables and chairs in front of a big tent we were to speak under....he had big cut out information boards set up around our area as we were walking up to to find out where we were to speak.....

He was there with another man from Native News Online....

As Aaron, sat in the second row seating with an open laptop on his lap....us survivors continued on with our speaking Aaron continuously was getting up from his chair and walking around towards the back and sides of the tent, as survivors were watching him, talking to certain people....while we were speaking...it became clear he was getting a certain type of way....as he was wanting to speak at our event and did not contact survivors to tell us he was going to be there... He did not respect our space, us and what we were doing....

Aaron addressed one of the survivors, who had her critically ill husband, with cancer there as, this was the first time, she was speaking, he wanted to be there....after chaos happened because of his attendance, he came up to her and said, you took my speaking time.... I was supposed to speak at 1 pm...if you want to talk with our study, here's a registration form, fill it out and we will give you a hundred dollars....in a not so nice way..

Needless to say, trust with survivors is a big part of our healing and Aaron was anything but a comfort to us... I attended Harbor Springs for 6 1/2 years....along with 6 of my siblings.....many of whom suffered at the hands of the school....

My hope is that, we can get justice for what we lived through while being there...

Thank you for your time....if there is anything you want to follow up with...I would be more than open to speaking with you....

Sincerely,

Marilyn Wakefield

I am a Survivor of Holy Childhood of Jesus. I attended from 1970-1974. I am a member of The Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians. I did not fill out the Kaufman survey because I was with 7 other survivors, from multiple Tribes speaking in public, when Aaron Payment working for Kaufman Group, came into our speaking space waving the survey card at us, telling us to go online to tell our story for a hundred dollar gift card. He totally interrupted us speaking, because he was out of time. He is also a Unit 1 Director, in my Tribe. He showed us no respect!

I don't trust him!

Trust is a very big issue with us Survivors.

Us Boarding School children were set up for failure. The Statute of Limitations from 1961, kept us from being able to prosecute. I was born in 1961. This has been in place my whole life. It needs to change to Eliminate the statute of Limitations for sexual and physical abuse involving minors in Michigan.

Do you have any idea what it has been like to live all these years, thinking that no one cared about the damage being done to us as children by the Catholic Church?

Over the many years seeing the changes to protect children, yet what happened to us has never been resolved.

The time is now!

We are all elderly and I truly believe, that we deserve to live the rest of our lives, in comfort, secure, and believed!

I am including a couple videos, of me speaking my truth.

- Elder Kim Fyke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPJ4z8OZlos>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxuGzbLwkRc>

For the record, I am a seminary ordained interfaith minister and trained 'modern rabbi'. Recently, I devoted time to reading Native American history and meeting Natives through a Native-Non-Native Women's group where we learn about Native culture from Natives. While it is difficult and painful to hear boarding school experiences, directly or through second generation survivors, it is important to bear witness and to be present. FYI, since 2022, I have been part of a Jewish Palestinian Reparations Alliance committed to face to face relationships with members of a West Bank village (via zoom). Getting to know Native Americans and Palestinians face to face allows us to know each other. We see and respect the dignity in each of us. This makes us WANT to make reparations, rather than avoid doing so. Without repairing the harm done, the pain continues... in all of us; the victims -- and the abusers. If it remains unhealed, it passes to the next generation, and the next. This is what I understand from studying intergenerational trauma. It seems that the REPORT on boarding schools recommended certain reparations. One thing I've learned from the experience with Palestinian villagers is that sacred listening helps us hear what they say is needed. What's

missing in the Report, I think, (I only read the Bridge summary), is a commitment to stop future harm. While there are no more boarding schools, there is still harm being done to Native people and culture. (E.g., the imminent excavation by Enbridge of sacred burial grounds.) It would be amazing if we, in Michigan, CHOSE, out of love, to implement reparations to Native and African Americans AND to prevent future harm to any and all of us.

LAUREN I. ZINN