

Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy in the U.S. Act

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The problem.

The full effects of the Indian Boarding School Policy have never been appropriately addressed, resulting in long-standing historical and intergenerational trauma, cycles of violence and abuse, disappearance, premature deaths, and additional undocumented psychological trauma. Additionally, the residual impact of the Indian Boarding School Policy remains evident in a lack of culturally inclusive and affirming school curricula and historically inaccurate representation of American Indian and Alaska Native people, history, and contributions.

The solution.

The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy in the United States Act will establish the first formal commission in United States history to investigate, document, and acknowledge past injustices of the federal government's cultural genocide and assimilation practices. The commission is intended to develop recommendations for Congress to aid in healing of the historical and intergenerational trauma passed down in Native American families and communities and provide a forum for victims to speak about these human rights violations for the first time.

Background

The Indian Boarding School Policy was implemented by the federal government to strip American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children of their Indigenous identities, beliefs, and languages. From 1869 and into the 1960s, the federal government funded schools aimed to "kill the Indian in him, and save the man," as infamously stated by Gen. Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, where approximately 180 AI/AN children died, never returned to their families, and are still buried on the campus in unmarked graves today.

Nearly 83 percent of AI/AN children, as young as 5 years old, were forcibly removed from their Tribal lands and families to be enrolled in one of 367 Indian boarding schools across 30 states that were designed to assimilate AI/AN children into White American culture by stripping them of their cultural identities, often amounting to human rights violations including physical, sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse and neglect. Additionally, the parents of the children who were forcibly removed were prohibited from visiting or speaking to their children, and their refusal to comply resulted in the loss of food rations, clothing, and sometimes incarceration. Many Native children suffered additional abuse when they were sent to white-owned homes and businesses for involuntary manual labor.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' [2018 Broken Promises Report](#) found that Native American communities continue to experience historical and intergenerational trauma resulting from Indian boarding schools' assimilation practices that divided cultural family structures, damaged Indigenous identities, and inflicted chronic psychological damage on AI/AN children and families. The lack of public awareness, information, and federal acknowledgement of these human rights violations remains evident in the general lack of documentation or public understanding of the cultural genocide of Native American traditions, languages, and culture.

The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policy Act Specifically:

- Establishes a Commission with representation from diverse experiences and backgrounds so as to include Tribal representatives and experts who will provide balanced points of view with regard to the duties of the Commission, including Tribal representatives and experts in education, children and families, and health.
- Requires the commission to develop recommendations for Federal action to adequately address the intergenerational trauma inflicted by the Indian Boarding School Policy.
- Develop solutions to stop the continued removal of American Indian and Alaska Native children from their families and Tribal communities under modern-day assimilation practices carried out by state social service departments, foster care agencies, and adoption services.