



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Office of the Assistant Secretary, Suite 600  
370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20447

April 15, 2013

Sue Settles  
Human Services Chief  
Office of Indian Services,  
Bureau of Indian Affairs,  
MS-4513-MIB  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Ms. Settles:

Let me express the support of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) for the efforts of both the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Bureau of Indian Affairs to protect children and improve child welfare services at Spirit Lake Reservation and thank you for the diligent work you are performing. **I appreciate the seriousness with which both of your agencies have responded to allegations of child abuse there, as well as your willingness to brief us on your investigations and efforts.** I also wish to reiterate that ACF stands ready to continue providing technical assistance to promote child welfare services at Spirit Lake.

As you know, our Regional Administrator Thomas Sullivan, located in Denver, Colorado, has questioned the conduct and commitment of your agencies in investigating and addressing suspected child abuse. **Please know that Mr. Sullivan's views do not represent those of ACF, and he was speaking only in his personal, not official, capacity.** As the attached communication sent to Mr. Sullivan today indicates, we have instructed Mr. Sullivan that he is not speaking for ACF on these matters. To that end, we have instructed him that he may not use ACF letterhead or any other official communication systems (e.g., his work email) to convey his personal views.

We recognize the utmost importance of reporting allegations of abuse and neglect to the appropriate authorities. **To that end, we have informed Mr. Sullivan that any allegations he makes should be done in his personal capacity, and have encouraged him to make use of the crime reporting hotline established by BIA Law Enforcement, Fort Totten, and BIA Social Services, Fort Totten.** If allegations come to ACF's attention through the ongoing work of our Children's Bureau, the office with programmatic responsibility for the child protection system, any official reports will be made by the Regional Program Manager of the Children's Bureau; the Commissioner for the Administration for Children, Youth and Families; or my office.

Based on the briefings that you provided to my staff, ACF is confident that the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Bureau of Indian Affairs are working hard to investigate and prevent child abuse

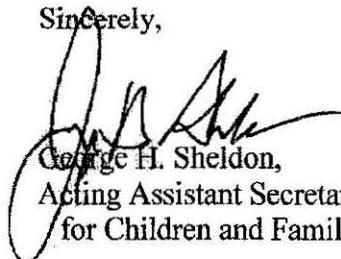
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at Spirit Lake. ACF is committed to supporting your efforts. We have had a long-standing partnership with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide services to Native Americans, and have been providing technical assistance for child welfare services at Spirit Lake since February 2012.

At the original request of Tribal Social Services (TSS), and in continuing partnership with BIA, our technical assistance contractor, National Resource Center for Tribes (NRC4Tribes), provided peer-to-peer consultation to help TSS get their case files in compliance with foster care requirements. Since the tribe's decision to retrocede the program to BIA, ACF has worked with TSS to help it perform an organizational assessment, and NRC4Tribes has developed training curricula for TSS staff on child protection and foster care quality practice. ACF stands ready to provide any additional technical assistance to help TSS and BIA to improve the quality of child welfare services at Spirit Lake. We know that improvements have been made, but like you, remain committed to furthering those improvements.

At the end of the day, we must all work hard to ensure the safety of our children. Nothing is more important. For that reason, we remain committed to our partnership with your agencies and to the children at Spirit Lake. I will provide this response to Mr. Timothy Q. Purdon, United States Attorney with the U.S. Attorney's Bismarck Office as well.

Sincerely,



George H. Sheldon,  
Acting Assistant Secretary  
for Children and Families

Cc: Mr. Timothy Q. Purdon, United States Attorney  
U.S. Attorney's Office, Bismarck, N.D.