

[Senate Amendment Includes Major Report on Indian Boarding Schools](#)

Category: Policy Blog

written by Jennifer Wendling | November 4, 2022

On October 11, 2022, the Senate filed an [amendment](#) to the *National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2023* ([H.R. 7900](#)). This amendment includes a major report from the Department of Defense (DoD) on Indian boarding schools and institutions under the control of the DoD.

Amendment Highlights

Section 5302 of the Senate-filed amendment includes a report from the DoD on “former Indian boarding schools and institutions under their jurisdiction or control.” In general, the Secretary of Defense would be required to submit a report to the appropriations committees of Congress providing the following information:

- An **account of all schools or institutions** that were located on land that was under the control of the DoD (currently or at the time of operation of a school or institution).
- Provide a **description of the role and actions** the Department took in facilitating these schools, including complete accountings, engagements, and actions, the identification of marked and unmarked burial grounds, and the repatriation of the remains of Native students who died while attending a school.

This amendment would also require the Secretary of Defense to consult and engage with Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations so that a comprehensive report is created in less than one year. Finally, the Secretary would ultimately brief the Congressional appropriations committees on the report’s findings.

Background

The National Council of Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) has continuously advocated for substantial efforts to address the historical trauma and public health impact that boarding schools had on urban American Indian and Alaskan Natives (AI/ANs) and to better understand how this intergenerational trauma has impacted urban AI/AN communities.

In December of 2021, NCUIH submitted [comments to the Department of the Interior](#) (DOI) regarding the agency’s [Federal Boarding School Initiative](#), led by Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American cabinet holder of DOI. Through that initiative, the DOI would begin to identify boarding school sites, locations of known and possible student burial sites located at or near school facilities, and identify the children and their tribal affiliations to bring them home to their families. NCUIH reiterated its ongoing support for the Administration’s efforts to address the impact of boarding school programs and emphasized the importance of studying not only the impact of boarding school programs for survivors but also the lasting impact of the intergenerational trauma caused by boarding schools within urban AI/AN communities.

In June of 2021, Francys Crevier (Algonquin), NCUIH CEO, issued a [statement](#) in response to the discovery of unmarked graves at Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada. She noted that

“Indian Country’s social determinants of health demonstrate the connection to the historical trauma inflicted by these governments that caused tremendous health consequences for our people – most recently with the COVID-19 pandemic taking the lives of many of our relatives.” NCUIH applauded Secretary Haaland for the administration’s efforts, noting the necessity of the United States and Canada to take responsibility for these horrific actions so the healing process may begin.

Finally, on June 15, 2022, the House Committee on Natural Resources held a [markup to consider a series of bills](#), including the *Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States Act* ([H.R. 5444/S.2907](#)). NCUIH worked closely with Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) on this landmark legislation to begin the healing process and ensure the inclusion of UIOs in the creation of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies. In May of 2022, NCUIH also submitted written testimony to the House Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States in support of H.R. 5444. During the hearing, several Members of Congress, such as Senator Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Representative McCollum (D-MN-04), expressed concerns and grievances about the horrific occurrences within boarding schools. Members from both parties agreed there was a need for an established commission, and four amendments were introduced on subpoena power (the compensation of commission members, the wording around funds, and the possibility for reparations). However, the only amendment to be accepted was the amendment editing, “such sums as may be necessary”. The bill passed the committee and now awaits a full hearing on the House floor.

Next Steps

NCUIH continues to advocate for legislation that addresses and rectifies the centuries of historical oppression against Native people and begins the healing process. NCUIH will continue to monitor this amendment and provide any updates on its movement.