

Fort Belknap Indian Community



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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and
to represent the Assiniboiné and the Gros Ventre Tribes
of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Councilwoman Johnson's Testimony on Tiwahe Played a Crucial Role in Advancing the 'Native Children's Commission Implementation Act' to the Senate Committee in Washington, D.C.

In late July 2026, United States Senator, Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), took the Senate floor to introduce the Native Children's Commission Implementation Act (S. 4976), which seeks to permanently authorize and fund the Tiwahe Initiative to improve comprehensive social, children welfare, and justice services in Native communities.

Murkowski respectfully recognizes tribal leaders, elders, youth, and the families who shared their perspectives on the bill. Not only did they share the importance, but they also helped educate members and staff of the committee and legislation. *"I really think that their presence, their stories, and their unwavering commitment has really brought this legislation to life,"* said Murkowski who also acknowledged Senators Schatz and Smith. *"Together, they made it clear that this is more than just the introduction of a bill. It is the continuation of a movement that's been built on years of partnership, perseverance, and hope."*

In late January 2026, Councilwoman Joan Johnson, represented the Fort Belknap Indian Community and delivered her testimony at the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Hearing in Washington, D.C. ***"For Fort Belknap, Tiwahe is not just a line item in a budget,"*** said Johnson. ***"It's the cornerstone of our success in protecting our most sacred resources, which are our children."***

Councilwoman Johnson's advocacy highlighted the importance of supporting Native children and families through effective policies and programs. This progress marked a significant step toward ensuring the well-being and rights of Native communities are prioritized at the federal level.

In Johnson's testimony, she argued that the act was truly in the best interests of Indigenous children; however, it needed to be well-funded to be successful. Johnson also shared the story of a young woman from Fort Belknap who had struggled with homelessness and addiction. This young woman received guidance and support from Tiwahe, which helped her discover her identity. Today, she is sober, raising her children, and actively working to build a brighter future for her family.

"The Fort Belknap Indian Community is proof that when Tribes are given flexibility to lead, our families thrive," said Johnson.

The Tiwahe Initiative is a successful pilot program providing holistic services that promote everything from child safety to family stability. *"The Native Children's Commission Implementation Act is not about creating one more federal program or one more report that's going to sit on a shelf somewhere. It's about strengthening what is already working in native communities,"* said Murkowski. *"It's about trusting tribal*

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Governments, investing in Native families, and ensuring that every Native child has the opportunity to grow up healthy, safe, and connected to their culture and be confident in who they are...that's a goal that should unite all of us!"

The goal is to codify the Tiwahe Program by moving the family-centered pilot initiative past its demonstration phase to offer permanent, flexible support. A tribal pilot program is a small-scale, test phase (federal or state) initiative designed specifically for Native American tribal governments. It tests new policies, services or funding models before deciding whether to expand them permanently.

Murkowski invites all colleagues (Republicans and Democrats) to join alongside her and Senator Schatz as co-sponsors of the Native Children's Commission Implementation Act. *"Let's show that when communities speak, Congress listens. Let's work together to build a future where every Native child has the opportunity to not only overcome challenges, but to become those leaders of the next generation,"* said Murkowski.

The movement forward in the Senate Committee brings hope for meaningful change and increases resources to Native children's health, education, and welfare.

This joint effort between the Tiwahe staff, elders and councilwoman Joan Johnson's dedication to this cause emphasizes their ongoing efforts to strengthen tribal sovereignty and promote justice for Native families in our community and Indian Country.

"The elders played a key role in sharing their wisdom and knowledge with families and youth to help heal the Aaniiih and Nakoda people. Their guidance and stories have been essential in preserving cultural traditions within the community," said Johnson. ***"By passing down teachings and experiences, the elders have supported healing, unity, and growth among our people, ensuring that the heritage of the Aaniiih and Nakoda Tribes continue to thrive for future generations."***

This is an ongoing effort to advance this bill through the Senate, with the goal of securing the necessary support for its passage. Continued collaboration and advocacy are essential to navigate the legislative process and address any concerns that arise. Fort Belknap Indian Community remains committed to pushing this bill forward in hopes of achieving a positive outcome.