

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 23-5359, FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING THE S.1723 TRUTH AND HEALING COMMISSION ON FEDERAL INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL POLICIES ACT IN THE U.S.

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Date: 11/2/23

Department: GAPD

Meeting Date: 11/16/23

Presenters: Katie McDonald, Tribal Liaison, and Andy Shaw, GAPD Director

Length: 25 minutes

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## **ISSUE STATEMENT**

Boarding schools for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (Indian boarding schools) were established by the U.S. to strip American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children of their identities, beliefs, and languages, in order to assimilate them into non-Indian culture, through federally funded, denominational schools, which had the effect of cultural genocide. Indian boarding schools employed practices including assimilation, corporeal punishments, and child labor, which were often carried out without law, policy, or oversight.

The deliberate intention of Indian boarding schools was the separation of Native American children from their families, cultures, and Tribal communities through removal, cutting their hair, taking their clothing and issuing uniforms, forbidding them to speak their language or engage in any cultural practices, and carrying out severe and often corporeal punishments constituting, in many cases, physical, emotional, and mental torture for non-compliance. Children suffered sexual, cultural, and spiritual abuse and neglect and experienced treatment that in many cases constituted torture.

Many children never returned home. Recent research led by the U.S. Department of Interior and the National Native American Boarding School and Healing Coalition (NABS) have identified 523 Indian boarding schools that operated in the U.S. since 1801 –across 38 states including Oregon. Many of these boarding schools received federal support from 1819 to 1969. Ten of the recorded Indian boarding schools operated in Oregon, including the Forest Grove Indian Training School. This school was the nation’s second federally funded, off-reservation Indian training school.

To date, there has never been a full accounting of the number of Native children forcibly institutionalized at Indian boarding schools, or were abused, died or went missing while attending boarding schools, or the long-term impacts and generational trauma of boarding schools on Native children and their families.

The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (Act), S.1723, would establish a federal commission (Commission) to conduct a full inquiry into the

assimilative policies of U.S. Indian boarding schools. The Commission would: document ongoing impacts from U.S. Indian boarding schools, examine the location of children, locate church and government records, hold culturally appropriate public hearings to collect testimony from survivors and descendants, gather institutional knowledge from subject matter experts, and share these findings publicly through a final report with a list of recommendations for justice and healing. In addition to the search for records, the Commission would bring together boarding school survivors with a broad cross-section of Tribal representatives and experts in education, health, and children and families to fully express and understand the impacts of the federal policy of Indian child removal.

Metro Council desires to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with Tribes with interests in the greater Portland metropolitan area through its Tribal Affairs program. In this work, Metro seeks to recognize tribal sovereignty, respect tribal rights and explore opportunities to incorporate tribal interests and priorities into Metro's work wherever practicable. The Tribal Affairs program cannot exist without a deep understanding of the historical and contemporary interests of Tribes and identifying how these interests can be advanced within Metro's work. It is critical that Metro dedicate staff time and resources to understand the historical and ongoing interests and priorities of Tribes with connections to the greater Portland area, including legacy connections that may be associated with Indian boarding schools that operated in the greater Portland area or state of Oregon more broadly.

Metro Council's adoption of Resolution No. 23-5359 expressing support for S.1723 will support efforts to establish a more comprehensive account of the historical and contemporary impacts of Indian boarding schools to Native children, their families and communities in the U.S. and in Oregon.

Through its allyship and support of S.1723, Metro Council is advocating for additional federal investigation, resources, collaboration and the future publication of information and recommendations that will help Metro advance opportunities for healing and transformation from the impacts of Indian boarding schools that intersect with Metro's work with interested Tribes.

## **ACTION REQUESTED**

Consideration and vote on Resolution No. 23-5359 expressing support for S.1723.

## **IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES**

Council adoption of Resolution No. 23-5359 will support multiple goals, principles and priorities identified in Metro's Tribal Affairs agenda. The efforts of a federal Truth and Healing Commission are anticipated to support and publish information that will directly inform Metro's forthcoming Historic and Cultural Resources Protection Program Office, which is currently being developed by Metro's Tribal Affairs, Parks and Nature and Capital Asset Management Division with interested Tribes. The Commission's investigation will

directly inform Metro's efforts to provide culturally specific and trauma informed programming to Indigenous communities and community members who may be navigating the legacy impacts of Indian Boarding Schools.

### **POLICY QUESTION(S)**

Would Council like staff to pursue additional efforts beyond Resolution No. 23-5359 via a regional letter of support for S.1723 to members of Oregon's congressional delegation?

### **POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER**

Council may also consider adding S.1723 as a legislative priority to the forthcoming Government Affairs and Policy Development federal affairs agenda.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Staff recommends the Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 23-5359.

Note that this resolution accomplishes prior Metro Council direction from the September 28 Council meeting. We plan to come to you again after outreach to interested Tribes with a draft letter of support to share with local jurisdictional partners to consider signing on to before sending to the congressional delegation.

### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION**

- Council adoption of this resolution will further the goals identified in Metro's Tribal Affairs agenda including:
  - Building positive relationships with Tribes, Tribal staff and representatives to explore opportunities for partnership and collaboration to address tribal interests wherever practicable in Metro's work.
  - Improving Metro's work through incorporating tribal perspectives and expertise, Traditional Knowledge, Indigenous world views and aboriginal rights. Collaborate with Tribes to provide opportunities to increase the public's understanding of tribal interests, priorities, histories and connections in the greater Portland area, where appropriate.
- Council adoption of this resolution also aligns with the legislative principles outlined in Metro's Tribal Affairs agenda because this issue:
  - Has a nexus with Metro's current work;
  - Is a shared priority advanced by Tribes, tribal leadership and Indigenous legislators;
  - Promotes substantive inclusion of Tribes and Indigenous people in decision making;

- Acknowledges past and ongoing discrimination and/or oppression of Tribes and Indigenous communities and populations; and
- Works to dismantle ongoing systems of oppression and/or work to rectify past harms.
- Council adoption of this resolution will further Metro's commitments to the goals stated in the Strategic Plan to advance Racial Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. It is anticipated the future Commission's efforts will produce and provide research and information that will support regional jurisdictions in advancing equity efforts, preserving sites of historical or ongoing cultural significance, and strengthening relationships with communities of color, in particular Indigenous communities and community members who have been impacted by the legacy of Federal Indian Boarding School policies.
- Known Opposition/Support/Community Feedback:
  - The Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, a tribally-established and led non-profit organization based in Oregon representing American Indians/Alaska Natives and over 50 member Tribes in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, northern California and Alaska support S.1723, as affirmed in Resolution #2023-43 at this year's ATNI Annual Convention held in Grand Mound, WA in September 2023. Additional ATNI resolutions including: #2023-44, #2022-33, #2022-01, #2017-24, #2013-32, and #2011-28, among others, express ATNI's support for and call on the U.S. federal government to acknowledge its role and responsibility for the historical and intergenerational traumas brought by the Boarding School policies and call for a beginning to the process of healing impacted people, families, communities, and Tribal Nations.
  - Other national organizations that have expressed their support for S.1723 include the National Congress of American Indians, the American Bar Association, the National Indian Health Board, and the Native Justice Coalition. Numerous other organizations and Tribes have endorsed the bill across the U.S.
- Anticipated Effects
  - Staff anticipate that adoption of this resolution will further Metro's relationship and partnership development efforts and goals with:
    - Tribes;
    - Tribal-serving organizations including the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition;
    - Urban Indigenous communities and community members;
    - Indigenous-identifying Metro staff; and

- Survivors and descendants of children and youth who attended Indian Boarding Schools or forcibly institutionalized in other associated facilities and institutions
- Staff anticipate that adoption of this resolution, Metro's forthcoming letter of support for S.1723 and the future work of the federal Commission will support future educational opportunities led by NABS and Tribes for Metro and other local government jurisdictions to learn about the Indian Boarding Schools and other associated facilities and institutions which impacted Indigenous Peoples and numerous Tribes in what is now known as present day Portland and the State of Oregon.
- Financial Implications
  - None.

## **BACKGROUND**

Council expressed their support for this type of legislation during the 2022 session by sending a letter of support for the prior versions of this federal legislation, S. 2907 and H.R. 5444, to members Oregon's congressional delegation.

During Metro's September 28, 2023 observance of the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools, Council requested the agency's Tribal Affairs program to bring forward a resolution of support for S.1723 for Council adoption and to draft an updated letter of support which could be signed by Metro Council and other interested local government jurisdiction partners across what is now known as greater Portland to be shared with the region's congressional delegation.

Today's staff presentation of Resolution No. 23-5359 accomplishes the first part of this Council direction. The Tribal Affairs program will continue to advance drafting of a letter of support to the congressional delegation for S.1723 to bring to Council at a future date after outreach and coordination with interested Tribes has occurred. Staff plan to share the letter of support with interested local jurisdiction partners after future additional Council action on the matter.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- Tribal Affairs Agenda
- ATNI Resolution #2023-43 Endorse S. 1723, A Federal Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act