Total of 28 BIA agencies nationwide to receive state-of-the-art technology to help ensure foster Indian child safety

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WASHINGTON – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney announced that the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Northern Cheyenne Agency on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation has deployed Tribal Access Program (TAP) biometric/biographic kiosks at its offices in Lame Deer, Montana. This state-of-the-art equipment will help the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe ensure the safety of on-reservation American Indian children in foster care through expedited background checks on foster parents and the adults in their homes prior to placement.

"The continued expansion of TAP to BIA Law Enforcement officers and Social Services personnel provides them with a critical tool for keeping tribal communities safe and protecting Native children in the foster care system," Assistant Secretary Sweeney said. "We are pleased to be able to leverage this technology for the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and partner with them in this deployment."

The Northern Cheyenne Tribe is the second of 28 BIA agencies to receive TAP kisoks; the first was the Anadarko Agency in Oklahoma in September 2019. All will have access to TAP kiosks by the end of FY 2020. A key aspect underpinning the launch was the BIA-Tribal partnership that leveraged and maximized the kiosks' use both by the Northern Cheyenne Agency and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. The two kiosks have been placed with the Agency's Social Services and Justice Services' program offices.

"One of the most promising aspects of this technological upgrade with Tribal access to the TAPS Kiosk, is the ability to place our children in the child welfare system with family members, this includes children in the Title IV-E Foster Care Program, Indian Child Welfare Act Program and BIA Social Services," Northern Cheyenne Tribe President Rynalea Pena said. "Expedited processing of foster care licensing for family members will help ensure our Tribal children remain connected to their families, Tribe and culture."

Before a tribe can place a child into foster care, the Native American Children's Safety Act of 2016 (NACSA) requires a criminal records check, including a fingerprint-based check of national crime databases of all adults in a home, and a check of tribal and state abuse and neglect registries where an individual has lived for five years. The Act also applies to BIA-operated Social Services agencies.

"We are pleased to conduct the work for the NACSA in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Tribal Access Program. The TAP kiosks will also extend access to Tribal social services and Indian child welfare programs," said BIA Director Darryl LaCounte. "This is a necessary tool in addressing the backlog for background checks to enhance Tribal efforts to protect children, register sex offenders, have orders of protection enforced nationwide, and improve public safety."

The Northern Cheyenne Tribe's Indian Child Welfare (ICW) program and Rosebud Lodge, its emergency youth shelter, were granted access to run fingerprint-based record checks to comply with NACSA. The kiosks will provide social services program, ICW program and youth shelter personnel with the ability to more quickly process record checks on prospective foster parents and staff who have care and control over Indian children.

"We look forward to the continued expansion of the TAP kiosks at our Office of Justice Services locations," said BIA Deputy Bureau Director – Justice Services Charles Addington. "Having direct access to these vital resources is crucial for Indian Country public safety programs. It also allows our law enforcement officers to receive information they need to do their jobs effectively while keeping them safe in the field."

The kiosks process finger and palm prints, take mugshots, and allow authorized users to access national crime information databases for federally authorized criminal and non-criminal purposes. Because the kiosk system is linked to six FBI crime databases, tribal access expedites background checks which then allows the Tribe to hire temporary and substitute house-parents on a more "speedier" basis. Hiring applicants for the Tribe's Title IV-E Foster Care Program and the ICW Program will also realize a markedly improved hiring process.

The BIA Office of Justice Services' (BIA-OJS) law enforcement division provides services and support to 64 tribes of which 53 currently do not have any direct or local access to TAP. The BIA agencies receiving TAP kiosks are:

1. Crow Creek Agency, Fort Thompson, South Dakota
2. Fort Totten Agency, Fort Totten, South Dakota
3. Lower Brule Agency, Lower Brule, South Dakota
4. Standing Rock Agency, Fort Yates, North Dakota
5. Turtle Mountain Agency, Belcourt, North Dakota
6. Winnebago Agency, Winnebago, Nebraska
7. Yankton Agency, Wagner, South Dakota
8. Anadarko Agency, Anadarko, Oklahoma
9. Concho Agency, El Reno, Oklahoma
10. Miami Agency, Miami, Oklahoma
11. Ponca Agency, Ponca City, Oklahoma
12. Colorado River Agency, Parker, Arizona
13. Eastern Nevada Agency, Elko, Nevada
14. Fort Apache Agency, Whiteriver, Arizona
15. Hopi Agency, Keams Canyon, Arizona
16. San Carlos Agency, San Carlos, Arizona
17. Southern Paiute Agency, St. George, Utah
18. Truxton Canon Agency, Valentine, Arizona
19. Uintah & Ouray Agency, Ft. Duchesne, Utah
20. Mescalero Agency, Mescalero, New Mexico
21. Northern Pueblos Agency, Ohkay Owingeh, New Mexico
22. Southern Pueblos Agency, Albuquerque, New Mexico
23. Ute Mountain Ute Agency, Towaoc, Colorado
24. Blackfeet Agency, Browning, Montana
25. Crow Agency, Crow Agency, Montana

26. Northern Cheyenne Agency, Lame Deer, Montana
27. Wind River Agency, Fort Washakie, Wyoming
28. Nett Lake Agency, Nett Lake, Minnesota

The BIA will deploy four TAP kiosks in March 2020. The first will be deployed at the BIA's Northern Pueblos Agency in Ohkay Owingeh, N.M., to help the tribes in its jurisdiction vet foster parents within their service areas. The six Northern Pueblos being granted access to the kiosk are:

1. Pueblo of Pojoaque
2. Pueblo of Nambe
3. Pueblo of Tesuque
4. Pueblo of Picuris
5. Pueblo of San Ildefonso
6. Ohkay Owingeh

The remaining sites are also BIA-OJS locations: Mescalero Agency, Mescalero, NM; Southern Pueblos Agency, Albuquerque, NM; and Ute Mountain Ute Agency, Towaoc, CO.

In addition, the BIA Office of Indian Services at the Fort Peck Agency in Poplar, MT, worked in partnership with the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, which is equipped with direct access to TAP-FULL. The Bureau began using the tribe's TAP kiosk on January 8, 2020, to comply with NACSA's requirements.

BACKGROUND

On October 28, 2018, the U.S. Departments of Interior and Justice **jointly announced** a dramatic expansion of DOJ's Tribal Access Program, which is offered in two versions at BIA agencies: TAP-FULL (with a kiosk) and TAP-LIGHT (without a kiosk). In addition to the three BIA agencies identified in the announcement as receiving the TAP-FULL kiosk, 28 BIA-OJS agencies, including detention centers, will gain access to the TAP-LIGHT version by the end of FY 2020. At these agency sites, BIA Law Enforcement provides service and support to 64 tribes. Of these, 53 did not have any direct or local access to TAP at the time of the October announcement.

TAP is the federal government's key program that provides tribes with access to the national crime information databases, including the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), Next Generation Identification (NGI), National Data Exchange (N-DEx), National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal (LEEP) as well as other national systems such as the International Justice and Public Safety Network (Nlets).

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, the oldest bureau in the Department of the Interior. The BIA director is responsible for managing the bureau's day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services, and Field Operations. These offices directly administer or fund tribally operated BIA infrastructure, economic development, law enforcement and justice, social services (including child welfare), tribal governance, and trust land and natural and energy resources management programs for the nation's 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes through 12 regional offices and 81 agencies.

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