New process will help ensure safety of children placed in foster care

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn today announced the collaborative initiative between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Spirit Lake Tribe of North Dakota to improve the health, safety and welfare of children being placed in foster care through the use of mobile fingerprinting units. Under the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006, all adults in a household where minor children are to be placed must be fingerprinted as an integral part of the background investigation.

"The collaboration by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Spirit Lake Tribe to expedite the fingerprinting process for foster homes demonstrates our joint commitment to protect the children while improving the efficiency of foster care services on the Fort Totten Indian Reservation," Washburn said. "I thank the Tribe's leaders for their cooperation and support in ensuring that Spirit Lake's children will be placed with adults who will protect and nurture them."

"The Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe is looking forward to the continued collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs on this project as we move forward to strengthen the protection afforded the most vulnerable citizens in our tribe," said Spirit Lake Chairman Roger Yankton.

On January 8, 2013, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Great Plains Region and Office of Justice Services provided fingerprint training to tribal and BIA Social Services staff at the BIA Fort Totten Agency. The Agency has received three mobile fingerprinting units that its social services staff will utilize for in-home fingerprinting of adults in foster homes where children in protected care may be placed.

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These mobile fingerprinting units will serve as a positive influence throughout the communities and the reservation by lessening the burden on potential foster families who currently have to devote large amounts of time and engage in extensive travel to provide this critical service.

In September 2012, the BIA agreed to Spirit Lake's request to assume administrative responsibility for the Tribe's social services program. In a September 14, 2012 letter, the Tribe stated it "would be in the best interest of the Tribe, its children, and its families, to voluntarily return the program to the Secretary of [the] Interior."

A retrocession means the return to the Secretary of a contracted program, in whole or in part, for any reason, before the expiration of the term of the contract by an Indian tribe or tribal organization, either one year from the date of the request, the date the contract expires, or a mutually agreed-upon date. The effective date of the retrocession of the Spirit Lake Social Services Program was October 1, 2012.

The BIA has continued to work with the Tribe since that time to ensure an effective transition of the program from the Tribe to the BIA.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the BIA, which is headed by a director who is responsible for managing day-to-day operations through four offices – Indian Services, Justice Services, Trust Services and Field Operations – that administer or fund tribally based infrastructure, law enforcement, social services, tribal governance, natural and energy resources, and trust management programs for the nation’s federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages through 12 regional offices and 85 agencies.
