Policy Strengthens Discussion at Haskell's "Restoring the Circle" Event

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Bureau of Indian Education today announced a new policy aimed at preventing domestic violence and sexual assaults at the two post secondary institutions operated by the BIE for American Indians: Haskell Indian Nations University (HINU) in Lawrence, Kan., and the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, N.M.

"As we recognize National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, it's important that we recommit to breaking the cycle of violence," Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin K. Washburn said. "One in five women have been sexually assaulted while in college, and this policy is an important step in our efforts to reduce domestic violence and sexual assaults at Haskell and SIPI."

The policy outlines actions, response protocols, authorities, and roles and responsibilities for the institutions to address reports on sexual assault, stalking, dating and domestic violence incidents at their campuses. A copy is available for review here.

The new policy was announced at a two-day kickoff event at Haskell for "Restoring the Circle: Ending Violence and Abuse on Tribal College and University Campuses," an initiative to address gender-based violence among college students and help increase awareness about reducing violence against American Indian women ages 16-24. The event was held by the BIE, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Office of Justice Services (OJS), Haskell, SIPI, and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), an organization of 37 tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).

Restoring the Circle is an initiative of the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs to stop violence against women on TCU campuses and to help keep them safe. Three TCUs are leading the campaign: Haskell, SIPI, and the United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) in Bismarck, N.D. These participating institutions – with a combined reach of approximately 3,600 American Indian students – are partnering with the BIE, BIA and AIHEC on the Restoring the Circle campaign. Other federal partners in the effort to stop violence against women on TCU campuses include the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women (OVAW).

Despite significant progress made in reducing violence against women, there is still a long way to go. In the last year, one in 10 teens reported being physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend, with young women still facing the highest rates of dating violence and sexual assault.

The Restoring the Circle campaign kickoff event encompasses two goals: 1) educate and train the campus community about gender-based violence such as sexual assault, domestic violence and on-campus stalking, and 2) provide students with the opportunity to take ownership of the Restoring the Circle initiative by engaging in behavior-changing activities in the community.

The Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs oversees the Bureau of Indian Education, which operates the federal school system for American Indian and Alaska Native children from the federally recognized tribes. The BIE oversees and implements federal education laws, such as the No Child Left Behind Act, in 183 elementary and secondary day and boarding schools on 64 reservations in 23 states serving over 40,000 students. The Bureau also funds or operates off-reservation boarding schools and peripheral dormitories near reservations for students attending public schools. The Bureau serves post secondary students through higher education scholarships and support funding to 35 TCUs, in addition to operating Haskell and SIPI.

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