Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Donald E. "Del" Laverdure today announced additional actions that Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials are taking to aid the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe in its efforts to improve child safety and protection on its reservation. On August 24, Laverdure announced that he was sending in a "strike team" of senior BIA officials to assess and evaluate efforts to improve the Tribe's social services program at the urging of U.S. Senator Kent Conrad.

The team, comprised of BIA Director Mike Black, Office of Indian Services (OIS) Deputy Bureau Director Hankie Ortiz, OIS Human Services Chief Sue Settles, and Office of Justice Services (OJS) Deputy Bureau Director Darren Cruzan, accompanied by officials from the Bureau's Great Plains Regional Office (GPRO) and Fort Totten Agency, arrived at the Fort Totten Reservation in North Dakota on August 26. On August 27 they met all day with the tribal chairman and other tribal representatives. Ortiz and Settles stayed the following day to meet with the Tribe's new social services director to provide technical assistance, discuss a corrective action plan issued by the BIA to the Tribe in April 2012, and share the Bureau's expectations for improvement.

"Protecting the youngest and most vulnerable tribal citizens is a high priority in our efforts to improve public safety in Indian Country," Laverdure said. "I want to thank the Spirit Lake leadership for working with us to improve their social services program. I also want to thank our BIA employees who have been and are detailed to the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe for their dedication to the safety and protection of all children."

The BIA will conduct a program review the week of September 10 and generate an internal report shortly thereafter that will give an assessment of the Tribe's progress on the corrective action plan. The Bureau will then determine what steps are appropriate going forward. The goal is to help the Spirit Lake Tribe safely and successfully operate its social services program.

Settles will return to the reservation on September 3 where she will remain for the next two weeks to assist the Tribe and supervise BIA social workers detailed to the Tribe's social services program. Starting on September 4, two supervisory social workers will arrive to assist tribal program staff in conducting home visits, following up on child protection referrals, and documenting such activities through appropriate protocols and forms.

BIA social workers also will continue assisting the program's new director with developing policies and procedures to address deficiencies identified in the corrective action plan issued by the Bureau to the Tribe in April. Tribal social service child protection workers will be attending a series of training sessions starting next month at the University of North Dakota to attain Child Welfare Certification.

The Tribe has been conducting weekly meetings with community stakeholders on collaborative approaches to meeting the needs of its children.

The BIA OIS has been working with the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe since August 2011 to help it improve

and strengthen its child safety and program compliance while respecting the Tribe's inherent right of self-governance. The Tribe has administered the social services program under an Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistant Act (ISDEAA) Title I contract with the BIA since 2001.

In August 2011, the BIA's Great Plains Regional Office's Division of Human Services in Aberdeen, S.D., found serious deficiencies in contract performance. Since the initial corrective action plan was issued by the BIA to the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribal Social Services program in November 2011, with a more detailed plan issued on April 23, 2012, the Bureau has provided financial, training, and technical assistance resources to the program.

The BIA will continue to provide such assistance for the foreseeable future and as resources allow. Ongoing and future efforts include:

- Recruiting BIA social workers to assist with on-site monitoring and technical assistance for up to one year contingent on funding,
- Coordinating with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) on resources for the Tribe,
- Working with IHS on training for mandatory reporters, and
- Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe, the BIA and law enforcement to complete National Crime Investigation Center federal background checks for each foster care placement.

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.

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