

**TESTIMONY OF
LAWRENCE ROBERTS
PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY – INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON H.R. 4534,
THE NATIVE AMERICAN CHILDREN’S SAFETY ACT**

JULY 29, 2014

Introduction

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Lawrence Roberts and I am the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior (Department). Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.R. 4534, the “Native American Children’s Safety Act,” a bill that amends the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act to require background checks before foster care placements are ordered in tribal court proceedings, and for other purposes. The Department supports the principles of H.R. 4534.

H.R. 4534, the "Native American Children's Safety Act"

The safety of Native children is a Department priority. The Native American Children’s Safety Act recognizes the importance of the safety of Native children through establishing standards in background checks. The Department notes that all placements made with Bureau of Indian Affairs funds require a background check. This bill would expand the requirement to all placements made through the tribal courts. As this Subcommittee may be aware, the Title IV-E background-check requirements are slightly inconsistent with those proposed in H.R. 4534. The Department looks forward to working with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which is the department that oversees the Title IV-E program, the bill’s Sponsor and this Subcommittee to create consistency in the requirements of background checks to avoid creating multiple standards. We also note that the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) provided thoughtful and detailed written comments and analysis on this proposed legislation. We agree with many of their suggestions and would like to suggest that the committee include them in further discussions.

Conclusion

This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.