

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

October 7, 2002



Re: Indian Child Welfare Act Amendments
H.R. 4733 **COMMENTS REQUESTED**

Dear Tribal Leader:

Our children are sacred to us. They are a part of our culture and one of the most important reasons that the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed in 1978.

For a number of years, tribal leaders, attorneys for Indian tribes, and tribal social service workers have been working on a set of amendments to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) that will strengthen the Act in a number of ways. These amendments are incorporated into a bill that has been introduced in the 107th Congress, H.R. 4733, by Congressman Don Young of Alaska.

A summary of the bill, along with a question and answer sheet about the various parts of the bill, is attached. We invite you to look at the entire bill, available at the Library of Congress Thomas web site that provides up-to-the-minute information on legislation pending in Congress. The website address is: thomas.loc.gov.

Personally, I believe that this bill represents a substantial improvement over earlier efforts, which were initially drafted to try to prevent proposed legislation in Congress that would have substantially weakened ICWA. Because those threats of negative legislation have now passed for the moment, Congressman Young wanted an ICWA amendments bill developed that would not only respond to earlier criticism of ICWA, but which also would strengthen the Act for the benefit of Indian tribes and their children throughout the United States. I believe H.R. 4733, if enacted into law, will do that.

Hearings on the proposed legislation will not be held this year, but will follow the introduction of a new bill in the 108th Congress. The introduction of a new bill provides an opportunity for additional tribal input.

NCAI would like a bill to be introduced that truly reflects the views of Indian Country on this important subject. Therefore, we invite the comments of all tribes about this bill, whether or not your tribe is a member of NCAI. We will also be discussing H.R. 4733 at a breakout session on Tuesday, November 12th from 1:15 pm -3:30 pm at the NCAI Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

Based on the comments we receive, a new version of H.R. 4733 will likely be introduced early in the next Congress. You should direct your comments to NCAI, to Sarah Hicks at shicks@ncai.org or via fax at (202) 466-7797.

Should you have any questions about H.R. 4733, I also invite you to contact David Simmons, Director of Policy and Research at the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) at desimmons@nicwa.org or via phone at (503) 222-4044.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.
Sincerely,

Tex G. Hall
President, National Congress of American Indians

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