



## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 30, 2025

**TO:** Winnie Brinks, Senate Majority Leader; Matt Hall, Speaker of the House

**FROM:** John E. Johnson, Jr., Michigan Department Civil Rights Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** Michigan Native American Boarding School Study

Please be advised of the following report from the Michigan Department of Civil Rights regarding the Michigan Native Boarding School (MiNABS) Study which is being respectfully submitted to the designated contacts.

Should you have any questions regarding this status update letter or need additional information, please contact Annie Urasky, MDCR Legislative Liaison at [UraskyA@michigan.gov](mailto:UraskyA@michigan.gov).

cc:

Governor Gretchen Whitmer  
Emily Paski, EOG Tribal Liaison  
Jamie Stuck, Office of the Tribal Legislative Liaison  
Jen Flood, State Budget Office  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
House Appropriations Committee  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on General Government  
Kathryn Summers, Senate Fiscal Agency  
Mary Ann Cleary, House Fiscal Agency

## Part 1: Report On the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study

### Introduction

Boarding schools for Native American children have left an unhealed wound across generations of individual survivors, their families, and their communities. The Michigan Legislature charged the Michigan Department of Civil Rights (“Department” or “MDCR”) with studying and producing a report about Native American boarding schools in Michigan that:

1. Identifies the number of Native American children forced to attend boarding schools in this state, the number of children who were abused, died, or went missing while at these schools, and the long-term impacts on these children and the families of children forced to attend these schools.
2. Locates, analyzes, and preserves records.
3. Works in concert, when appropriate, with the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative.
4. Interviews boarding school survivors, their family members, and a broad cross-section of Michigan tribal representatives and experts specializing in duration, health, and children and families with the purpose of fully understanding the impacts of policies of Native American child removal. [2022 PA 16, § 421; see also 2023 PA 119, § 401; 2024 PA 121, § 406.]

Each of these questions or tasks focused on one issue: ***What happened at Native American boarding schools in Michigan?*** As the Legislature’s questions suggest, living boarding school survivors, as well as their families and members of their communities, have information to share that begins to answer this central question. Their experiences and how the boarding schools have affected them are not fully reflected in existing written records.

This report is organized around the language specified in 2025 PA 22, §406. Additionally, the Department is sending all written responses to its contractor’s draft report that it received from Tribal Nations concerning this project along with this report. Those responses, while not formally part of this report, stand on their own and reflect Tribal Nations’ leading role in understanding and responding to the impact of boarding schools on survivors and their descendants.

### **Information on the Activities Conducted for the Study by the Department and its Contractor**

In the beginning of this project, the Department hoped to contract with a knowledgeable consulting firm to conduct a broad study and prepare a lengthy report. The Department intended that the report include historical research specifically in and about the boarding schools in Michigan to pair with the knowledge survivors, their families, and their communities are willing to share. After two rounds of requests for proposals, the Department finally was able to contract with a firm to conduct the Michigan Native American Boarding School Study (MiNABS Study) in January 2024. However, as the Department began to work with its contractor, Kauffman and Associates, Inc. (KAI), it became clear that there was inadequate time to conduct all the necessary historical research and produce a comprehensive report.

The Department did not receive the full initial draft of the MiNABS Study Report from KAI until January 2025; the month KAI's contract was set to expire. The Department submitted a preliminary status report to the Legislature that same month.

In May 2025, the Department submitted a second status report to the Legislature. The Department indicated that the estimated date of publication of the final written report and video was anticipated to be November 30, 2025. At that time, the Department was assessing how to work with KAI's draft of the MiNABS Study Report. Prominent issues with KAI's draft at the time included:

- Failure to address the history of what happened in boarding schools in Michigan and how the State of Michigan contributed to this system;
- Exceedance of the scope of the charge in the legislative boilerplate;
- Conclusions regarding issues outside the expertise of the researchers, including legal conclusions regarding federal treaties and other matters with unknown or potentially negative consequences both to the State and Tribes;
- Statements and claims without factual support/citation or sources; and
- An overall unreadable format/structure.

KAI's draft report required substantial revisions and a structural overhaul to focus on answering the questions that the Legislature posed. Consequently, the Department executed a contract extension so KAI staff could complete that work and other tasks.

In July 2025, MDCR sent Tribal Leaders and Tribal representatives participating in the Tribal Advisory Group (TAG) the initial draft of KAI's report to get their response and gauge their interest. The initial KAI draft consisted of a "literature review" and a "findings" section.

In August 2025, MDCR provided Tribal Leaders and members of the TAG with the revised "Consultation Draft" of the KAI report and links to videos for their review and feedback. The Consultation Draft focused on the work KAI conducted with boarding

school survivors and their descendants, while the videos primarily focused on interviews with boarding school survivors.

Pursuant to the Governor's Executive Directive 2019-17, the Department held a formal Tribal Consultation in late August. The comments received from Tribal Leaders and members of the TAG, which are synthesized in Part III of this Report, affirmed the Department's prior concerns related to KAI's research scope, methodology, and work product. Notably, the comments also suggested that KAI used unethical approaches in its human-subject research methods, calling into question whether participants had given informed consent. This was the first time that the Department had received comments of that nature. As the Department was considering its next steps, it continued to work to obtain KAI's materials related to the MiNABS Study so that they can be preserved as required by the appropriations language.

On September 30, 2025, the last day of KAI's contract, KAI circulated an unauthorized third draft of the MiNABS Study Report to Tribal Leaders and Tribal representatives without the Department's advance knowledge or permission.

In October 2025, the Department conducted a follow-up meeting with Tribal representatives. Again, it received comments about KAI's methods. At the Tribal Consultation in August and the meeting in October, many Tribal Leaders, survivors, and their descendants urged the Department not to accept and distribute KAI's work product, as it may cause further harm to victims.

The Department is submitting this shorter report - instead of KAI's work product - as the MiNABS Study Report because of the serious questions raised about KAI's work. Not having a comprehensive final report to submit today is a disappointing result for all involved in this project, but the Department sees no other feasible option. Too many questions exist concerning KAI's work and not enough time or funding exists for the Department to restart this project.

The MiNABS Study was a first step by the State to start to understand what happened in boarding schools in Michigan, an issue that requires more time and resources than this project allowed. Tribal governments and institutions have long led the way toward healing in their own communities, conducting research, keeping memories and knowledge alive, and raising awareness about boarding schools. Part II of this report provides a high-level overview of boarding school history for context, and Part III provides Tribal Nations' recommendations about future research regarding boarding schools, as well as actions other State departments can take to promote healing and justice around this chapter of Michigan's history.

### **Total Expenditures to Date**

The total appropriation to the Department for the MiNABS Study: \$1,250,000

The total amount the Department has expended on the MiNABS Study: \$1,125,000

The total amount remaining for the MiNABS Study through September 30, 2027:  
\$125,000

## **Publication of the Report on Boarding Schools**

Please see below.

## Part 2: A Brief History of Native American Boarding Schools

### Introduction: Federal Healing and Justice Framework

In recent years, the federal government has undertaken its most comprehensive effort to reckon with the legacy of Indian boarding schools in the United States, a system designed to forcibly assimilate Indigenous children by erasing their cultures, languages, and identities.<sup>1 2</sup> This took place primarily through the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative (FIBSI), launched in June 2021 by former Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland, the first Native American to lead the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department of the Interior).<sup>3</sup> The initiative's mandate is to identify and document all federal Indian boarding school sites, review historical records, and locate burial sites.<sup>4</sup>

The Department of the Interior released its first investigative report (Volume I) in May 2022, marking the first time the U.S. government publicly acknowledged its role in operating boarding schools in “the pursuit of a policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession.”<sup>56</sup> That report identifies 408 federally supported or operated boarding schools between 1819 and 1969 across 37 states (or then-territories), including Michigan, and confirms the existence of at least 53 associated burial sites across the United States.<sup>7</sup>

In July 2024, the Department of the Interior released Volume II of its investigative report, expanding the dataset to 417 boarding schools and documenting at least 973 child deaths while attending these schools.<sup>8</sup> The second volume also includes an Appendix A listing the names and locations of these schools.

The Department of the Interior has paired the investigative work with a series of healing and truth-telling initiatives<sup>9</sup>, including:

- The Road to Healing Tour, a nationwide series of listening sessions that began in 2022.<sup>10</sup>
- A \$3.7 million dollar grant to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) to establish the first federally supported oral history archive of survivor testimony.<sup>11</sup>
- The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, introduced and reported favorably out of committee in July 2025, which would formalize a national commission to continue the federal investigation, recommend federal action based on the Commission's findings, and promote healing.<sup>12</sup>

Former Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Deb Haaland, stated that an “all-of-government approach is necessary to strengthen and rebuild the bonds within Native communities that federal Indian boarding school policies set out to break.”<sup>13</sup>

### Boarding Schools in Michigan

FIBSI used four criteria when examining whether an institution met the definition of a federal Indian boarding school.<sup>14</sup> Those criteria were

whether the institution (1) provided on-site housing or overnight lodging; (2) was described in records as providing formal academic or vocational training and instruction; (3) was described in records as receiving Federal Government funds or other support; and (4) was operational before 1969.<sup>[15]</sup>

Based on those criteria, FIBSI has identified five federally supported boarding schools that operated in Michigan.

1. Baraga Chippewa Boarding and Day School, Baraga, MI, 1884-1902, also known as Chippewa Mission; Holy Name Boarding and Day School.
2. Catholic Otchippewa Boarding School, Schoolcraft County, MI, 1883-1888, also known as Otchippewa Day and Orphan Boarding
3. Mackinac Mission School, Mackinac Island, MI, 1823-1837, also known as Mission House; Michilimackic or Michilimackinac School; Mackinaw Mission School for Native American and Metis Children
4. Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School, Mt. Pleasant, MI, 1893-1934, also known as Michigan Indian Industrial Boarding School; Mount Pleasant Indian School; Mount Pleasant Training
5. New L'Arbre Croche Mission School, Harbor Springs, MI, 1829-(as late as) 1983, also known as Holy Childhood of Jesus Catholic Church and Indian School; Holy Child Harbor Springs Boarding School; Holy Childhood of Jesus Church

FIBSI also identified other institutions that met some, but not all, criteria the Department of the Interior used when identifying boarding schools, including more than thirty institutions in Michigan.<sup>16</sup>

### **Purpose and Operation of Boarding Schools**

The Department of the Interior's 2022 report quotes a U.S. Senate report describing the boarding school era as one in which "education was a weapon."<sup>17</sup> This "weapon" accomplished two policy goals — "Indian territorial dispossession and Indian assimilation."<sup>18</sup> In other words, separating Indian children from their homes and sending them to boarding schools both "replace[d] the Indian's culture" to "subdue the Indians" and "help[ed] the whites acquire desirable land."<sup>19</sup> The former Secretary of the Department of the Interior concluded that the United States' objective was to "sever the cultural and economic connection between Indian Tribes . . . and their territories."<sup>20</sup>

"The Federal Indian boarding school system deployed systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies to attempt to assimilate" Native children.<sup>21</sup> This is commonly referenced as the policy to "kill the Indian, save the man."<sup>22</sup> Students were forbidden from speaking their Native languages or practicing their tribal traditions.<sup>23</sup> Upon arrival, children often had their hair cut, traditional clothing confiscated, and

names changed to English ones.<sup>24</sup> They were assigned military-style uniforms and subjected to regimented daily schedules, including academic instruction and manual labor.<sup>25</sup> The Department of the Interior acknowledges that within these schools there was “rampant physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; disease; malnourishment; overcrowding; and lack of health care.”<sup>26</sup>

Further, boarding school rules were “enforced through punishment, including corporal punishment, such as solitary confinement,” and through methods like humiliating a child in front of a large group of other students or by withholding food.<sup>27</sup> Federal Indian boarding schools also “conducted discipline by making older children . . . punish younger children.”<sup>28</sup> The Department of the Interior observed that these practices contributed to an “attitude of conflict with authority of any sort” and a trend of children escaping and running away from Indian boarding schools.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the boarding school system was part of a broader federal strategy of assimilation and territorial control, the legacy of which continues to shape tribal-state relations and federal trust obligations today.

### **Child Removal and Coerced Attendance**

Attendance at these institutions was rarely voluntary. FIBSI found “ample evidence” to support the conclusion that “the United States coerced, induced, or compelled Indian children to enter the Federal Indian boarding school system.”<sup>30</sup>

Federal law, particularly after 1871, empowered the BIA and federal Indian agents to withhold rations, annuities, or medical aid from families whose children did not attend school.<sup>31</sup>

The FIBSI explains that many families resisted these removals by refusing to send their children to school.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the Department of the Interior’s police force, called “Indian police,” entered reservations and removed Native children from their homes.<sup>33</sup> Runaways were pursued, captured, and punished.<sup>34</sup> For many survivors, the most enduring trauma was the forced separation from parents, siblings, and community life.<sup>35</sup>

### **Survivor Testimonies, Lived Experiences, and Ongoing Impact**

The voices of survivors and descendants are at the heart of the national reckoning over Indian boarding schools. Through the Department of the Interior’s Road to Healing tour (2022-2024), survivor narratives consistently described physical punishment, emotional neglect, and spiritual suppression.<sup>36</sup> Survivors shared that they were beaten or confined for speaking their languages, denied adequate food, and subjected to hard labor under the guise of industrial training.<sup>37</sup> Volume I of the FIBSI (2022) confirmed that many schools maintained corporal punishment regimes and disciplinary systems akin to penal institutions.<sup>38</sup>

At the Holy Childhood of Jesus School in Harbor Springs, former students recounted years of forced silence, deprivation, and violence. The Saginaw Chippewa Indian



Tribe's researchers uncovered records from the Mount Pleasant Indian Boarding School "confirming the deaths of 227 children while at Mount Pleasant. The search for their remains is still underway."<sup>39</sup>

The Road to Healing sessions in Michigan and other states have offered many survivors their first opportunities to share their experiences at Indian boarding schools.<sup>40</sup> Former Secretary Haaland framed this as both a truth-seeking and restorative process: "The federal government . . . took deliberate and strategic actions through Federal Indian boarding school policies to isolate children from their families . . . These policies caused enduring trauma for Indigenous communities."<sup>41</sup>

The Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative sheds a new light on how the Federal Indian boarding school system produced intergenerational trauma by disrupting family ties in Indian Tribes.<sup>42</sup> As the Department of the Interior's report documented, there are at least 74 marked and unmarked burial sites at 65 different schools, and many families never saw their children again.<sup>43</sup>

These traumatic events had lasting personal and systemic impact. Volume II of the FIBSI Report references several studies explaining how childhood events can have long-term negative effects on mental and physical health:

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are a measure of potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years) that are assessed by eight challenges: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, intimate partner violence, household substance use, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and household member incarceration. Although ACEs are an individual measure, the literature recognizes that ACEs for American Indians and Alaska Natives "may be associated with intergenerational experiences and trauma including genocide of [American Indian and Alaska Native] individuals, abuse from the boarding school system, interruption of traditional practices, and centuries of colonialism."<sup>44</sup>

On a systemic level, the boarding school era gave way to a new, similar generation of federal Indian policy. In 1957, the U.S. Government advocated for state social workers on Indian reservations to adopt out Indian children to non-Indian families.<sup>45</sup> This was called the Indian Adoption Project, which resulted in the often-unwarranted removal of hundreds of Indian children between 1958 and 1968, who were later placed with and adopted by white families.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. had a policy goal at the time "to terminate the legal and political relationship between the U.S. and Indian Tribes, diminishing the already low tribal citizenship base."<sup>47</sup> These Indian adoptees experienced "higher rates of depression, low self-esteem, and suicide compared to white adoptees," along with greater rates of alcohol and drug addiction.<sup>48</sup> In response to the Indian Adoption Project, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in 1978.<sup>49</sup> The Michigan Indian

Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) was enacted by the Michigan Legislature in 2012 “to clarify and strengthen the federal Indian Child Welfare Act.”<sup>50</sup>

Several comments in Part III of this report focus on Tribal Nations’ own perspectives of the ongoing impact of the boarding school era on communities across Michigan. Ultimately, acknowledging intergenerational trauma is about understanding continuity. The boarding school policies set out to break family and community bonds; the present generation’s work—through truth-telling, education, policymaking— and healing is to rebuild them. As the federal investigation continues, the testimony and resilience of survivors offer the most compelling blueprint for that repair.

### **Conclusion**

The history of Native American boarding schools in Michigan reflects a broader national policy that sought to erase Indigenous identity through forced assimilation. These five institutions functioned as instruments of cultural destruction, separating children from their languages and communities.<sup>51</sup> Rooted in government policy, this resulting trauma has reverberated across generations, shaping health, education, and cultural outcomes that persist today.<sup>52</sup>

The federal government’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and the ongoing Road to Healing tour mark an important turn toward truth and accountability. By documenting historical evidence, elevating survivor testimony, and acknowledging intergenerational trauma, these efforts begin the work of rebuilding trust and restoring what was taken. Yet, as former Assistant Secretary of the Interior Bryan Newland emphasized, truth-telling is only the first step toward healing.<sup>53</sup>

### **Part 3: Comments And Recommendations from Tribal Consultation**

On August 28, 2025, the Department hosted a formal Tribal Consultation with elected officials and staff from 11 of 12 federally recognized sovereign Tribal Nations that share geography in Michigan. The Department also collected any written comments that the Tribal Nations chose to submit. Below are general themes that emerged from the comments and recommendations that the elected Tribal leaders and their staff shared with the Department.

#### **Legislative Charge, Timeline, and Budget**

- Many Tribal Nations shared with MDCR that the charges given in the boilerplate language from FY 2023 and FY 2024 budgets would have needed regular disbursements of funds over several years, potentially overseen by new full-time staff or a commission, to accomplish and answer. This aggressive timeline and budget explain why they thought that the draft report that MDCR's Contractor prepared for consultation was difficult to read and lacked the substance that Tribal Nations thought the State was seeking in this project.
- Some Tribal Nations shared that it seemed like the purpose/plans for the study developed along the way, because entities from the State couldn't easily answer questions about scope at the beginning of the process.
- Some participants shared that they thought the Contractor's study plan was unrealistic, and the project was destined to fail from the beginning because of the timeline the State gave them.

#### **Written Research Methods and Scope**

- Some attendees shared that even if the State promised to keep the identity of survivors and descendants anonymous, survivors and descendants should have been reminded that their relatives and community members may be able to discern their identities based on the details in their interview responses.
- MDCR received comments that the scope of this research should have mirrored the list of boarding schools in the [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#) findings.
- As part of its proposed study plan, the Contractor requested that each Tribal Nation designate a representative to a "Tribal Advisory Group (TAG)." At Consultation, the MDCR received comments and questions about the role of the TAG, and whether Tribal members were able to review and respond to survey questions and consent forms in advance.
- MDCR received one comment that the Contractor oversold its ideas and research approach at the beginning and was unable to carry it out in practice.
- Some Tribal Nations expressed concern that none of the work product or drafts addressed how the schools operated (who made decisions, what was the

structure of the system) in favor of a focus on qualitative analysis (survivor and descendant truths).

### **Approach to Interviewing and Surveying Survivors and Descendants**

- Participants shared that the process of truth-sharing is inherently re-traumatizing for survivors and descendants and is taxing on their spirits. As part of its proposed methods, the Contractor agreed to perform follow-up to check on the well-being of participants after sharing their truths. Some participants shared that this follow-up for survivors and descendants was uncomfortable, as the people making phone calls were not the same people conducting interviews and felt like talking to a stranger, which is also retraumatizing. There was a suggestion that the State should find a way to engage in better follow-up now.
- Several participants shared an opinion that the Contractor's approach was unethical because its representatives came into pre-existing spaces, uninvited, where survivors were already sharing their truths and tried to divert their attention to sharing their truths for this study instead (i.e. handing out surveys).
- The Department received several comments indicating that the Contractor did not follow its proposed research methodology when it was in the field distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews with survivors and descendants.
- The Department received several comments indicating that the Contractor verbally told survivors during interviews about how their responses *would be used*, which differed from how the Contractor actually used those responses. Some participants expressed that the Contractor had people that were known in the community conduct the interviews, which felt exploitative.
- MDCR received comments that the Contractor did not tell participants that their video testimony would be public and used for promotional purposes (as opposed to being shown in a closed room with State officials).
- MDCR received feedback that the materials the Contractor distributed to advertise talking circles and surveys were confusing. For instance, some of the Contractor's materials used quick QR codes (i.e., quick response codes) to provide information but elders have trouble using QR codes.

### **Reactions to Report Content and Videos**

- The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe shared with MDCR that it chose not to participate in the study because it was concerned that the State did not properly consult with them about the selection of a contractor, scope of the work, and research process. MDCR received several comments that the report content was flawed because it was drafted without input or support from the Saginaw Tribe.

- Some attendees felt that the initial graphic design for the draft report shared before consultation misused a traditional design – the Ojibwe floral pattern – that should not be used on a report coming from the State about a dark chapter of history.
- Some attendees felt that the phrase “story-telling” was inappropriate. This term implies a fantasy or fairy tale, but what happened to people was true testimony of lived atrocities.
- Some attendees felt that watching the edited video testimony “sensationalized” their pain and some other attendees were confused about why there was a trailer for the edited videos, leading into inquiries about their intended uses.
- Some attendees shared how this history is difficult for most tribal citizens to read because it involves experiences from their own family members that they maybe haven’t even heard about at home yet.
- MDCR received a comment that one experience not reflected in the research related to the children who were old enough to get kicked out of boarding schools for resisting the authorities and what they faced out in the world on their own at the age of 12, etc.
- Some participants shared the importance of having preserved these survivor/descendant truths, because some family members who survived the boarding schools did not “pass down” these experiences or talk about them to future generations (thinking they were too painful for children to know about).
- Some participants expressed an opinion that, because these schools were located in Michigan, State Government is definitely culpable for what happened in the boarding schools, even if the research didn’t explicitly answer that yet.
- MDCR received a comment that the research was inconsistent, the documentation was incomplete, and the recommendations were hard to find. The product was not thorough, accurate, or survivor centered.

### **Transparency of Information and Processes**

- MDCR received comments that Tribal Nations should be given access to all of the sources, research, and information gathered as a part of this study because it belongs to their relatives, including all of the Contractor’s agendas, notes, and work product.
- MDCR received requests to see the Contractor’s budget and invoices to understand how they spent money, including verification that participants were compensated with honoraria as promised.

### **Tribal Self-Determination and Data Sovereignty**

- Some Tribal Nations shared that research projects like these are often best performed by Tribal Nations in-house, with fiduciary co-management from the State but not direct project management. This is because Tribes know best how to work with their citizens that survived boarding schools (or their descendants)

and often have already started their own archives. This is also a better way to maintain confidentiality for survivors, because most State entities are subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). It also better respects the sensitive nature of the work, because survivors and descendants already have trusting relationships in their own communities.

### **Recommendations for Use of the Contractor's Original Work Product and/or Edited Draft**

In an attempt to condense the initial draft into a more readable product, the MDCR made significant edits. Much of the conversation at the Tribal Consultation focused on which of the Contractor's drafts, if any, the Department should accept as final and make public. MDCR received the following input:

- MDCR received a comment that, if a report is submitted to the Legislature, MDCR should emphasize that it is a pinhole peek into this history and not at all a comprehensive study.
- Some participants expressed a desire not to publish or submit a report at this time given the concerns expressed at Consultation.
- Some participants felt that some version of a report should still be submitted and published because an initial effort and basic education is still important and not many states have attempted this.
- MDCR received two comments that the original draft was preferable to the draft shared for consultation because it had more substance about how pervasive and complex the boarding school system was throughout the country. Also, the shortcomings of that original work product demonstrate why the appropriation and timeline were too limited.
- MDCR received a comment that publishing these drafts may be permanently detrimental to the Tribal-State relationship, and that it would be more harmful than helpful.
- MDCR received a comment that deadlines should not take priority over truth, healing, and accountability.
- Some attendees expressed concern that the work products minimize the boarding school experience because there were so few study participants, and by not doing it justice, no one will think it's important.
- MDCR received a comment that the issues with the draft report go to the heart of whether the draft could be trusted and submitting it to the Legislature in its current form would risk misrepresenting survivors' voices and repeating harm.
- Some Tribal Nations recommended sending the existing drafts and research to Ziibiwing Center, which is an existing Tribally led entity in Michigan that documents and educates about the Boarding School history. There were several

comments suggesting that Ziibiwing Center could complete this unfinished work in a good way.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

- MDCR received one comment that the State is just as complicit as the federal government in the operation of these boarding schools. Several Tribal Nations expressed a continued desire to understand how State policies, resources, and authorities contributed to the Native American Boarding Schools in Michigan.
- A few Tribal Nations shared that the State should partner with the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition in an ongoing capacity, including setting up an entity or designating a specific liaison within State government to fill that role.
- Tribal Nations suggested further research into counties and municipalities for their role in the boarding school history.
- Tribal Nations suggested that future research should cover other religious denominations besides just the Catholic churches (in particular, the Episcopalian churches).
- MDCR received a comment that there are likely more undiscovered schools in Michigan and further research should focus on finding schools that the Federal Initiative did not yet list.
- MDCR received a comment that historic research is needed on orphanages, as similar policies resulted in Native American children being separated from their families and placed in long-term homes for orphans rather than boarding schools. According to this commenter, facilities operated like boarding schools and students were not actually “orphans.”
- MDCR received one recommendation to create and fund a statewide commission that would continue this work.
- MDCR received comments about how the connection of this history to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act (MIFPA) should be emphasized.
- MDCR received a comment about how the connection of this history to the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver should be emphasized.
- Several participants felt it is very important to understand and answer the question: “How were these schools financed?”
- Participants shared their frustration with not being able to subpoena or access necessary documentation from the Catholic Diocese, even for survivors and their family members to view *their own files*, including their birth certificates, which would help with future research and healing.

### **Recommendations for Healing/Justice Initiatives**

- Some Tribal Nations communicated to the Department that these Boarding Schools were designed to eradicate their culture and populations, and therefore recommended that the State fund initiatives designed to bring that back, such as:
  - Anishinaabemowin (language) revitalization/education programs; and
  - Trauma-informed therapy practices like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Somatic Healing.
- MDCR received comments about the impact of trauma on substance use disorders and suggestions that the State of Michigan should invest greater resources into detox, treatment, and prevention initiatives for boarding school survivors and their descendants.
- MDCR received several comments about the link between generational trauma and higher rates of incarceration, particularly for youth. Participants felt that the State should increase resources for prevention and rehabilitation of indigenous minors caught up in the justice system.
- MDCR received several recommendations that the State should focus its attention on prosecuting people/organizations involved with the Boarding Schools and recovering the remains of family members that did not survive.
- MDCR received a recommendation that the State financially compensate Tribal Nations or their citizens for the impacts of generational trauma resulting from the Boarding School Era.
- MDCR received one comment about reintroducing state legislation that would expand the statute of limitations for civil lawsuits regarding sexual assault.

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<sup>1</sup> [Department of the Interior Releases Investigative Report](#), Outlines Next Steps in Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative | U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>2</sup> [Secretary Haaland Announces Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#) | U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I](#), Asst. Secretary Newland letter.

<sup>6</sup> [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II](#), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I](#), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II](#), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> [Secretary Announces Milestones for Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#).

<sup>10</sup> [Testimonies from The Road to Healing Tour](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Interior Dept Launches Effort to Preserve Federal Indian Boarding School History](#) | U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>12</sup> S. Rept. 119-54 -

[Truth & Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act Of 2025](#), Library of Congress



<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> [List of Federal Indian Boarding Schools \(FIBS\). Appendix F, pp 6-7, to Volume II](#) of the FIBSI Report.

<sup>17</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 21, quoting the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Indian Education: A National Tragedy – A National Challenge, S. Rep. No. 91-501 at 143 (1969) [hereinafter “the Kennedy Report”].

<sup>18</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 21, quoting the Kennedy Report.

<sup>20</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>22</sup> [“The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites”](#) by Captain R.H. Pratt delivered at the National Conference of Charities and Correction, June 23-29, 1892, Denver, CO; accessed via Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center and the HathiTrust Digital Library.

<sup>23</sup> [The legacy of Michigan’s Native boarding schools](#)—and how tribes are reclaiming what was lost.

<sup>24</sup> [Chapter 3: Boarding Schools](#) - Native Words, Native Warriors - National Museum of the American Indian.

<sup>25</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 53. .

<sup>26</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 54-55.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 54.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>30</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 36.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 35-36.

<sup>32</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 35, referencing the Kennedy Report.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 29.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 55.

<sup>35</sup> [Legacy of Trauma: The Impact of American... | Native America | PBS.](#)

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 80, 87.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 80-82, 87-89.

<sup>38</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 54-55.

<sup>39</sup> [Indian boarding school investigation faces hurdles in missing records](#), legal questions; NBC News.

<sup>40</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary Haaland Announces Major Milestones for Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative | U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>42</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, p. 5, 16, 42.

<sup>44</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, p. 63 citing: Hedegaard H, Miniño AM, Spencer MR, Warner M, Drug overdose deaths in the United

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States, 1999-2020, NCHS Data Brief, no 428, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (2021); Kariisa M, Davis NL, Kumar S et al. Vital Signs: Drug Overdose Deaths, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services (2022); Giano Z, Camplain RL, Camplain C et al., Adverse Childhood Events in American Indian/Alaska Native Populations, Am J Prev Med (2021).

<sup>45</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> *Id.*

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 60-61.

<sup>49</sup> [“ICWA, MIFPA, and Child Welfare,” Michigan Indian Legal Services.](#)

<sup>50</sup> [State of Michigan ICWA/MIFPA Field Guide.](#)

<sup>51</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume I, Asst. Secretary Newland letter.

<sup>52</sup> Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report, Volume II, p. 60.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* at 4.