

Testimony of Barbara Fabre to the Commission on Native Children
Virtual Hearing, September 29, 2020

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Boozhoo, my name is Barbara Fabre and I am a member of the White Earth Ojibwe Nation, which is the largest of the 11 tribes located within in Minnesota. I am honored to present and provide testimony to the esteemed Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children. My testimony is based on my experience with the programs mentioned in this document. Having lived and worked the past 34 year in tribal communities, I feel I can speak to what has worked well in the areas of early childhood for the families we served. For your review, I have provided a brief summary of the federal and state programs I have worked with.

My experience has been as a former Tribal CCDF Administrator for my tribe, local school board member, chairperson of a national tribal child care association, Indian Child Welfare Foster Care Licenser, Employment & Training Counselor, Education Division Director and years of committee work, on local, regional, state, federal and national levels.

One of the highlights of my career was as Tribal CCDF Administrator for my tribe. I was responsible for the **Child Care and Development fund (CCDF)** also known as the *Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG)* which was enacted under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. The CCDBG Act was amended and reauthorized by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, and again by the CCDBG Act of 2014. It is important to know that the Child Care and Development Fund is a federal block grant to States, Tribes, and Territories and is a key resource to help increase the availability, affordability, and quality of child care services. CCDF made \$8.2 billion available to states, territories, and tribes in fiscal year 2019. There are 265 Tribal CCDF Grantees. CCDF allowed our tribe to develop tribal licensing standards (ours exceeded the State Licensing Standards), a child care assistance program, the development of health & safety quality improvement grants and cultural programing to our tribally licensed child care providers. We provided early childhood training to both formal, informal providers, parents and grandparents. We also co-founded the annual Communities Collaborative Brain Development Conference that brought local and national experts to a rural reservation to hear the latest on brain research and development (2001 to present).

The Conference as well as many other family-oriented community events we initiated, couldn't have happened without strong collaboration, partnership and teamwork. As a CCDF Tribal Administrator, I knew the importance of collaboration, building relationships and ensuring that the tribal community input help guide our work. CCDF funding allowed us to immerse our services with language and culture that reflected our community. Our Program collaborated with two **Head Start** programs, one tribal one and one non-tribal program who served Native American children. *Head Start programs deliver services to children and families in core areas of early learning, health, and family well-being while engaging parents as partners every step of the way. Head Start programs promote the school readiness of children ages birth to 5 from low-income families by supporting their development in a comprehensive way. A new statute in Head Start requires the development of a system of designation renewal for grants, and a revision of the Head Start Program Performance Standards. Head Start is in 155 tribal communities. In 2019, total overall funding was \$10,028,460,690. Of that amount, \$320,491,164 was allocated to federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations for AI/AN Head Start programs administered through Office of Head Start Region XI.*

Another extremely important partner was the Tribal Home Visiting Program, also known as the **Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)**. *MIECHV provides grants to tribal*

organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate home visiting programs in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The Tribal Home Visiting program is funded by a 3 percent set-aside from the larger MIECHV program. Tribal Home Visiting grants are awarded to Indian tribes, consortia of tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations. The Tribal Home Visiting Program is designed to develop and strengthen tribal capacity to support and promote the health and well-being of American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) families; expand the evidence-base around home visiting in tribal communities; and support and strengthen cooperation and linkages between programs that service AIAN children and their families. There have been 30 tribal communities who have received MIECHV funding and there are currently 23 grantees.

In a recent article by James Heckman and Ganesh Karapakula (August 2019), shared that research has shown home visiting programs “are effective and relatively low cost compared to other early childhood programs. Intergenerational benefits of high-quality early childhood education for underprivileged children.” The article provides strong evidence from the iconic Perry Preschool Project. The Perry Preschool Project was a social experiment implemented in the US in the 1960s. The oldest early childhood intervention trial with long-term follow-up, it saw five cohorts of African American children from low-income families in Ypsilanti, Michigan, randomly assigned to attend free, high-quality preschool. This column shows some of the lasting benefits, particularly for males, of an early childhood education program targeted at disadvantaged children – from reduced crime to improved executive functioning, socioemotional skills, earnings, and health. It also documents the intergenerational benefits of the intervention on the children of the original participants.

Another important program is the **Special Education Program** that mostly services Head Start children on our reservation, is made up of **Part C: PL 108-446 Sec. 643 (b)(1)(4)** *The coordination of assistance in the provision of early intervention services by the States to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families on reservations served by elementary schools and secondary schools for Indian children operated or funded by the Department of the Interior. The funds received by a tribe, tribal organization, or consortium shall be used to assist the States in child find, screening, and other procedures for the early identification of Indian children under 3 years of age and for parent training. Such funds may also be used to provide early intervention services. An individual under 3 years of age who needs early intervention services because the individual is experiencing developmental delays, as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in one or more areas of cognitive development, physical development, communication development, social or emotional development, and adaptive development; or has a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in a developmental delay.* **Part B: PL 108-446 Sec. 611 (h)(4)(D)** *The Secretary of the Interior shall distribute to each tribe, tribal organization, or consortium an amount based on the number of children with disabilities aged 3 through 5 residing on reservations as reported annually, divided by the total of those children served by all tribes or tribal organizations. The funds received shall be used to assist in child find, screening, and other procedures for the early identification of children aged 3 through 5, parent training, and the provision of direct services.*

In my early years working for our tribe, we had another BIE funded early childhood program that was a strong collaborator and partner, the **Family and Child Education (FACE)** program. FACE is an integrated model for an American Indian early childhood education/parental involvement program. The FACE program primarily serves families with children prenatal to 5 years of age by providing early childhood, parenting and adult education services. The goals of the FACE program are to: support parents/primary

caregivers in their role as their child's first and most influential teacher, strengthen family-school-community connections, increase parent participation in their child's learning and expectations for academic achievement, support and celebrate the unique cultural and linguistic diversity of each American Indian community served by the program and promote school readiness and lifelong learning. Home-based services are delivered by parent educators primarily to families with children ranging from prenatal to 3 years of age, although they also serve children from 3 through 5 if their family cannot participate in center-based or other preschool services. On average, home-based services were provided for 117 days in PY19. Due to funding constraints, the FACE program closed.

In 2007, we had the privilege to work with the State of Minnesota on their the Race to the Top Grant Awards for States that are leading the way with ambitious yet achievable plans for implementing coherent, compelling, and comprehensive education reform. The State of Minnesota chose 4 Transformation Zones to initiate this new funding stream to implement a new and innovative early childhood services. White Earth Reservation was one of the four. **Early Learning Scholarship (ELS)** were created to help families pay for high-quality child care and early education to help their child get ready for school. An ELS scholarship must be used at a Parent Aware-Rated program. Parent Aware is a rating tool to help parents select high-quality child care and early education programs (Minnesota's Quality Rating System). The Early Learning Scholarships increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for 3- and 4-year-old children with the highest needs to improve school readiness for all young children. Children birth to 2 years old are eligible if they meet one or more of the following criteria; child of a teen parent, currently in foster care, in need of child protective services or experienced homelessness in the last 24 months. While similar to the child care assistance, there are two components of ELS that makes it uniquely different and successful: there is no copayment, and the scholarship follows the child anywhere in the State, which was significant to foster parents and grandparents or relatives raising grandchildren. ELS Program not only supported children to be in high quality early childhood programs (child care, Head Starts or Preschools (school-based)) but it gave parents/caregivers the ability to choose which early childhood program best fit their family needs, because of its flexibility. We also were able to include other quality services to our ELS families such as training and home-visiting.

The design of the ELS was based on research which shows that *investing in children has been demonstrated to improve their lives, both during the school-age years and afterward, as assessed by outcomes such as employment and income; these investments often help those in the most need. Campbell et al. (p. 1478) report that these investments can also lead to improved adult health. Results from a randomized and intensive intervention that involved 122 children in four cohorts recruited in the 1970s suggest that full-day child care for the first 5 years of life has produced adults in their 30s with better metabolic and cardiovascular health measures.* This has the potential of positively affecting multiple generations of families when services such as high quality early childhood, home visiting and culture supports are available in tribal communities.

During my years as a CCDF Administrator, we collaborated with many agencies, including other early childhood programs, school districts, Indian Health Center, BIE tribal school, Police, Public Health as well as our County partners on community events. However, it wasn't until our tribe received the **Tribal Early Learning Initiative (TELI)** funding and guidance were we able to take collaboration to a whole new level. TELI brought together the WE Public Health Department, Child Care and Head Start programs to figure out how we can better work together for families. It was hugely successful and was the basis for another huge collaborative effort to support multi-generations of families (WECARE).

The **Tribal Early Learning Initiative (TELI)** was a partnership (2012-2017) between ACF and American Indian tribes with Head Start/Early Head Start, Child Care Development Fund, and Tribal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting programs. The purposes of the TELI are to support tribes to coordinate tribal early learning and development programs, create and support seamless, high-quality early-childhood systems, raise the quality of services to children and families across the pregnancy-to-kindergarten entry continuum and identify and break down barriers to collaboration and systems improvement. ACF worked closely with the TELI tribes to identify obstacles to collaboration and systems improvement, and to help them develop and carry out strategies that are in line with tribal community values, traditions, and priorities. ACF also hoped that the TELI tribes would serve as models for other tribes and communities that are trying to work across traditionally siloed programs to build stronger early childhood systems to support their youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

Because, of TELI's success, the White Earth tribe applied and received a small grant through the White House Rural Initiative. This funding helped create a new and innovative case management system as well as a tribal data system within the tribal governmental branches of Health, Education, Public Safety, Human Services and Housing. The White Earth Reservation Business Committee (aka Tribal Council), passed a resolution mandating all Tribal Programs to participate in the White Earth Collaboration, Assessment, Resources and Education (WECARE) initiative in an effort to address the health disparities and the multigenerational poverty faced by many on the reservation. Tribal leaders and tribal programs fully supported and implemented two-gen and multi-general approaches as that has been our traditional way since the days of our early ancestors.

As state previously, TELI helped create the **White Earth Collaboration, Assessment, Resources and Education (WECARE)**. WECARE is a case management model that was developed by the WECARE Development Team in collaboration with all Tribal programs to offer families a more holistic approach. We knew that we could not serve just the child, in order to ensure success of the whole family, we needed to offer families a more comprehensive case management system with all the tribal programs that interacted with that family. Instead of the family going to several different programs, the programs came to them. WECARE also allowed us to create a new data system for White Earth Programs. While finding the right data software to use was challenging, the tribe was able to select one that met most of their needs. While the data system doesn't 'talk' to other State or Federal data systems, it was able to have multiple layers of security and meet the need for tribe to collect demographic data, make instant referrals based on family needs and the ability to use that information to help guide policy, funding or services. I feel strongly that it is critical for tribes to own and manage their tribal data system in order to tell their story with data. WECARE was designed to meet the family where they are and to provide direct referrals to child care, head start, health, education, Indian Child Welfare, employment, education, housing and safety services to promote family economic self-sufficiency. Through WECARE, families 'drive the bus' by information they put in their Family Plans. Having personally been involved with these programs and being at the table over the years to help guide and implement the WECARE initiative has helped me understand the importance of what true collaboration can be and what a monumental impact it can have on generations in Indian Country.

In 2016/2017 I left the tribe and started my own consulting business, Indigenous Visioning to have the opportunity to work with and support other tribal communities through resources, partnerships and opportunities. One of the projects we had the opportunity to do was the plan and facilitate a **Statewide Tribal Early Childhood Tour** (funded by Close the Gap by 5 and MN Children's Defense Fund) to visit

Tribal leadership and their tribal early childhood programs. We visited 10 of the 11 tribes, a metro based tribal early childhood program. Each Tribal Nation has their own unique story with dreams and ambitions for supporting their tribal members and constituents. They spoke proudly of their early childhood programs, their communities and their culture. Tribal leaders know their community and they support culture and language preservation, while still recognizing their challenges. While the stories and conversations was a snapshot of each tribal community visited, it was profound to hear of the phenomenal work that is happening in the early childhood field within each tribal community. Tribal leaders also shared some of challenges they face in meeting the needs of the children and families. We felt this was a starting point for building relationships, making connections and providing support for the intense and complex work provided by those in the field. While each tribal community was as unique as the next, the following list were some of the common themes:

Early Childhood Successes

- Strong Tribal Council support
- Longevity of management staff
- Knowledgeable, caring and dedicated staff
- Use of evidenced-based systems of care and services
- Funding streams support early childhood in Indian Country
- Majority of programs are Parent Aware Rated (3 or 4 Star)
- Strong Professional Development system
- Relationships with community partners
- Strong Family Resource Program
- Incorporating language into all programming
- Wrap-Around services

Early Childhood Challenges

- Supply of Child Care
- Low parent involvement
- Transportation - Long distances to travel for services
- Children's mental health needs
- Staff recruitment and retention (workforce)
- Tribal Data (funding)

More recently, I had the pleasure of working with the State of Minnesota on their **Preschool Development Grant (PDG)**. Indigenous Visioning worked with the State on their statewide community needs assessment throughout Minnesota's Indian Country. During these visits, we met with parents

with young children to find out what was important to them and what their concerns were. We went to tribal communities three times to provide information on the PDG grant, to collect information, bring back information (a compilation of all the data) and to report back. These community meetings were extremely informative with the common threads that almost mirrored what Tribal leaders stated in the Tribal Early Childhood Tour. I have had great conversations with State officials to work on separating the tribal data from the rest of the statewide data to create a document for Tribal leaders.

Throughout my career, many of the programs and services that we developed and initiated all had inter-generational benefits. I have also been proud of how well the State and Tribes work together, which then leads to improved communication, resources and opportunities. The research shows that by providing the highest quality early childhood to the child, it had a lasting benefit as an adult. During the Tribal Early Childhood Tour, *Leech Lake Reservation Tribal Council member, Leroy Staples Fairbanks III said it best "Giving kids what they need is just like building a house. It's good to put money into the roof and the sides, but the most important part is the foundation."* The research shows that high quality childhood is the best return on investment (ROI) that policy makers can make. Which is better explained by my friend, Art Rolnick. As an economist he advocates "*based on years of research and numerous studies, investing in early childhood education for our most at-risk children is proving to be one of the best public investments society can make*" (*Art Rolnick , Adjunct Professor of Economics, University of Minnesota, Former Senior Vice President and Director of Research, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.*

I apologize for the length of this testimony, however, I felt it important to show the many different programs and funding streams that go into a tribal community and their benefits to children, families and communities. While federal or state funding has limits to allowing tribes the ability to serve members who may not reside on or near the reservation boundaries (urban tribal communities), due to service area constraints, for those on the reservation, there are enormous gains because of these funding streams and partnerships. As a Native American I feel strongly that these programs are needed and they are making a difference. I support tribal sovereignty and applaud those tribes who have created their Internal Review Board (IRB) processes to protect their members, I also feel that tribes could benefit from more tribally-controlled research to show the benefits of their efforts and the early childhood benefits mentioned in this document. Research has shown the negative effect of historical trauma has had on our people for generations. We as Indigenous People, know what is best for our communities and with direct funding to tribal communities, strengthens our work with families with hope that we can someday reverse the effects of historical trauma for future generations.

Chii Miigwech for this opportunity.

Respectfully,

Barbara Fabre, CEO
Ojibwe Nation, MN
Indigenous Visioning