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North Dakota and tribal nations sign updated comprehensive agreements enhancing child welfare services for Native American children and families

BISMARCK, N.D. – Today, the North Dakota Department of Human Services and four Native American tribal nations signed updated comprehensive agreements to enhance child welfare services for Native American children and families. The agreements were signed during a ceremony in Memorial Hall at the state Capitol that included Gov. Doug Burgum, tribal chairpersons and officials from the Department of Human Services and Indian Affairs Commission. Representatives from Casey Family Programs, the regional Children’s Bureau office of the federal Administration for Children and Families in Denver, CO, and the Native American Training Institute were also in attendance.

Under the agreements, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation; the Spirit Lake Nation; the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa will receive federal Title IV-E funds through the state to support an enhanced array of child welfare services, expanded subsidized adoption services and the subsidized guardianship program.

In addition, the updated agreements offer access to prevention services under the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, which realigns federal funding to strengthen families and protect children. The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate nation operates child welfare programming from its South Dakota office, and has a Title IV-E agreement with the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

“There is no greater responsibility than raising the next generation of North Dakotans,” Burgum said. “This historic action to update these agreements shows strong commitment by the state and tribes to improve outcomes for children and families and continue our collaborative partnership built on understanding and mutual respect.”

The last time Title IV-E agreements were signed between the state and the four tribal nations that share geography with North Dakota was in 1983. The agreements supported the Indian Child Welfare Act and permitted the tribes to maintain jurisdiction and case management of Native American children placed in foster care. There were two amendments to the original agreement that allowed the tribes to access federal funds for social service staff and foster parent training and expanded Title IV-E coverage for eligible children who were adopted through tribal court.

“Wopila (thank you) to the many people from the tribes, the state and national partners who collaborated for countless hours to make these new agreements a reality,” said Scott Davis, Indian Affairs Commission executive director. “This is yet another strong step in strengthening tribal engagement and relationships.”

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While tribal nations can work directly with the federal government to access Title IV-E funding, these updated agreements show the commitment by all parties to continue to work together for the benefit of children and families.

“Today is a landmark day for state and tribal relations,” Chris Jones, executive director of the North Dakota Department of Human Services, said during his closing remarks. “These agreements make additional services available to our tribal partners. The department was told by a national expert the agreements are likely the most comprehensive and respectful in the country.”

These updated state and tribal Title IV-E agreements take effect immediately. There will be ongoing communications between the state and tribes to allow for future amendments as needed.

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