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Board of Trustees, Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.
Ramah Navajo Reservation, Cibola County, Pine Hill, New Mexico**

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Submitted to the United States Congress:

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES**

FY 2013 Federal Budget Request for:

**BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA) / BUREAU OF INDIAN
EDUCATION (BIE) & INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE (DHHS/IHS)**

FEBRUARY 22, 2012

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Request Summary: On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc. (RNSB), we are requesting funding to address three major needs of the Ramah Navajo Reservation community in Cibola County at Pine Hill, New Mexico. We are requesting Congress to: (1) Appropriate \$2.1 million for a new DOI BIA/BIE “Early Childhood Education Center” at the Pine Hill School. (2) Appropriate \$3.63 million for a “Ramah Navajo Community Elder Center.” (3) Appropriate \$2.925 million for replacement construction for a new “Central Administration” building” for the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.

Background. RNSB was founded in 1970 by the Ramah Navajo Chapter of the Navajo Nation and eventually came to govern the K-12 Pine Hill School, the IHS Pine Hill Health Center, and 30-plus other school and community programs on the Ramah Navajo Reservation at Pine Hill in Cibola County in northwestern New Mexico. RNSB now operates the BIA/BIE K-12 Pine Hill School, the IHS clinic, and the community’s radio station -- all firsts for Indian tribes in the country for these BIA, IHS and CPB programs. The Ramah Navajo School Board serves the Ramah Band of Navajo Indians and, on their behalf, I want to thank the Congress for the support that it has provided to our community over the past 42 years.

The Ramah Navajo people are well aware of the current fiscal climate in our country and the many difficult decisions that must be made to restore economic prosperity for all Americans. That being said, the Federal Government, mainly through the BIA and IHS, has an historic and long-standing trust responsibility for the education, health and natural resources of American Indian communities such as Ramah Navajo, who, long before the current economic downturn, struggled to provide basic services to its community members. The BIE school system, for example, has long been underfunded, and the FY 2013 proposed budget falls far short of remedying this state of affairs. Given the importance of education and health to the future viability of our community, we hope that the Congress will recognize and address the very real funding needs of our community since RNSB also faces unique challenges and must receive Federal funding to continue to provide essential programs and services. Ramah Navajo has three major requests this year, as follows, for which it seeks your support.

Priority One Request: Appropriate \$2.1 million for an “Early Childhood Education Center.” Our greatest need is to plan, design and construct a building to house the Pine Hill School’s four preschool programs of “Head Start”, “Family and Child Education” (FACE), the “Early Intervention Program” (EI), and the “Child Care Center” (CCC). All these programs are now housed in four separate rooms or housing areas scattered around the campus, all are in need of repair or renovation, and all are constantly in violation of, or close to violating, their health and safety codes.

Federal law and regulations for each of the four programs differ, but if all four programs are based in one building, then this building must, based on our present data, accommodate: (1) 215 children. (2) Ages 0-to-12 years of age. (Services of one program includes prenatal care, but, being done at the homes, this would not impact on square footage needs.) (3) In a building with 25,000 square footage of space to accommodate all children, classrooms, a kitchen preparation area, dining area, indoor play area, a parent meeting room, offices for all staff (including part-time consultants), a large nurse’s office with multiple rooms, a changing room, and a janitor’s room and storage area. (4) Depending on how staff and consultants might be shared, 20-to-25 staff members. (5) On a site that will accommodate a drive-in and pickup safe area for parents and children, as well as a multiple outdoor playground space.

However, if these four preschool programs are relocated into a single building, we will not only be able to make sure that they are compliant with all health and safety codes, but the four programs will be able to share such resources as: (1) Kitchen and dining areas. (2) Indoor & outdoor playgrounds. (3) Classrooms and education equipment & supplies. (4) Staffing. (5) Restrooms & storage areas. (6) Childhood nurse or health care staffer. Since there are various requirements, such as so much square footage per child for each child enrolled in each of the four programs, the plans include the installation of “moveable” interior walls to enable us to expand and decrease the child spaces as each program increases and decreases in enrollment over the years. Our plans are to locate this building near the only paved road in our community in order that parents may safely drop off and pickup their children away from the school campus. Our plans also call for children to be transferred to the Child Care Center if, say, Head Start should happen to close early one day so those children can be safely cared for by the CCC.

We are certain that this preschool center will work for us because the idea of a consolidated building to house two, three or more preschool programs is not new in this area since the nearby Alamo Navajo and Laguna Pueblo have had such centers in successful operation for several years, and there are probably others in the State and on Indian reservations around the country.

Priority Two Request: Appropriate \$3.63 Million for a Ramah Navajo Community Elder Center. There is a great need in our community for a “Ramah Navajo Community Elder Center” that would be located near the Pine Hill Health Center so elders can have a Center dedicated exclusively to their needs. Our community is spread out over 625 square miles with only one paved road, and most family hogans and houses are geographically remote, raising concerns about the well-being of our elders. Approximately 480 residents over 65 and another 905 between the ages of 50 and 64 are seen regularly at the Pine Hill Health Center. Although some elders qualify for part-time caregivers through Medicaid to help with the functions of daily living, most of our elders do not, leaving them vulnerable to many unmet needs, such as illnesses and accidents, bathing, cooking hot meals, care of personal finances, and other elderly needs.

The Pine Hill Health Center has already received an IHS “Elder Initiative” grant to conduct a comprehensive survey of our elders, covering everything from a personal needs assessment,

home safety and environmental assessments, thorough physical exams and a community evaluation and survey of elder needs. This study shows that the community is very much in need of a “Community Elder Center” that will address the needs of our elders, including, but not limited to, health care, nutrition, education, intergenerational social activities with our students in conjunction with our K-12 Pine Hill School, and space to train local caregivers. As the median age of our population rises, as our IHS-funded survey confirms, this community will increasingly require a facility where services to this growing and vulnerable population can be provided. The Ramah School Board officials have met with the IHS Area office to discuss this need. We are beginning the process to get this project on the IHS priority list, but have been told that it is probably a 20-year waiting period. This is unacceptable to us and to our elders.

Priority Three Request: Appropriate \$2.925 million for a new Central Administration Office. Built of four modular units in the early 1970s to house the Executive Director, Business and Personnel offices, the Office also needs to have its parking lot redesigned and resurfaced. The on, and furnishing the new building with modern equipment and technology. The RNSB Central Administration has been operating in its present building, formerly used by the BIA, and has only been renovated with temporary fixes in attempts to meet the daily routine of administrative office work and the needs for safety and health compliance. Central Administration is a vital office that services all RNSB programs for payroll, accounting, procurement, property inventory, insurance, human resource administration, and other legal, reporting and record-keeping requirements.

Environmental Health Hazard. Frequently infested, In a survey conducted in 2006 for hazard identification purposes, the focus was on property conservation and public liability issues. In this survey, rodent droppings were found in numerous locations throughout the campus, in the interior walls of buildings, including the Central Administration building. Rodents are also digging under the exterior walls to get into the building. This presents significant environmental health issues because of the potential for exposure to *hanta virus*. It has been recommended that we replace all exterior walls, and the roof and interior finishes. However, given 30 years of occupancy, insufficient funds for repairs and maintenance, and the need for major renovations to bring the building up to a safe and usable condition, means that a new structure should be constructed.

Automatic Sprinklers. Our ground water supply is inadequate to service hose streams should a fire occur. The RNSB facilities are located in a wooded area and exposed to brush fire that could destroy most or all of the facilities. A risk report identified a fire hazard for the Central Administration building since there are no automatic sprinklers in the building. A fire hazard, without automatic sprinkler protection, can spread as far as combustible material exists. Damage can be severe, sometimes total. Even if a fire is controlled, there will be extensive smoke and water damage, in addition to the fire damage. A recommendation was to install automatic sprinklers on a wet pipe system for combustible obstructed construction. Automatic protection should be extended to concealed spaces where there is combustible construction.

Power Shortage and Hazards. We were cited for inadequate and obsolete accounting system in our audit reports since 2006. The Business Office has implemented a new system, which requires a dedicated server and Internet access on a 24/7 basis; this requires an adequate power supply for it to function properly. RNSB is in a remote area and we often experience lightning strikes that shut down the automated accounting system and Internet services.

Technology Needs. Currently, the buildings’ facilities are not fully equipped to meet the high

demands of electronic communications, but a new building should enable us to connect all programs under one roof with an internal network to enable the administration to serve all programs with the latest state-of-the-art technology and communication equipments: i.e., computers, electronic mail, facsimile and telephone systems.

Dilapidated Building. The Central Administration building has been in use for over 35 years without any major renovations and, due to normal wear and tear, the building is run down.

The Plan. The proposed plan is to construct a new Central Administration building with a sufficient parking area built in phases. The planning phase will be to design, perform archeological clearance, site surveys, and conduct an environmental assessment, soil testing for the new site, on a land site that is slightly north of the current Central Administration building. The actual construction will entail procurement of materials and supplies, project management, and construction contractors and subcontractors. The final phase will be to purchase office furnishings, computer and office equipment, and computer servers for high speed connectivity.

Budget Estimates. (1) Planning. Costs for design, archeological clearance, site surveys, environmental assessment, soil testing, and salaries: \$75,000. (2) Construction. Costs to purchase building materials and supplies, construction contracts & subcontracts, oversight and administration by a project manager, and parking lot: \$ 2,500,000. (3) Furnishings & Equipment. Design office settings and furnishings equipped with computers and other office equipment, Internet, software and hardware servers: \$350,000. (4) Total cost: \$ 2,925,000.

We thank the Subcommittee for considering our requests.

Respectfully Submitted,

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