

[REDACTED]

YOUR ADDRESS

[REDACTED]

CITY, STATE, ZIP

[REDACTED]

DATE

NAME OF MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

XXX House Office Building Washington, DC 200XX

Dear Representative NAME:

As a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and a constituent of your district, I write to you today urge your support for the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). As one of the largest federally recognized Indian tribes in the United States, with more than 460,000 citizens across the country and spanning more than 7,000 miles across northeastern Oklahoma, there are hundreds of Cherokee children who would be at-risk of being removed from the homes of their loving families without the protections of ICWA.

The Indian Child Welfare Act, or ICWA, is a landmark piece of legislation meant to keep Native children with their families and their tribes. When ICWA became law in 1978, 25 to 35 percent of all Native children were removed from their homes and 85 percent of Native children who were removed were placed outside their families and communities.<sup>1</sup> ICWA works to reverse this trend by establishing federal guidelines that states are required to follow in custody proceedings involving Indian children.

While ICWA has been the law of the land since 1978, it continues to sustain attacks in the courts. Congress must remain vigilant, and ensure that ICWA not only remains law, but is strengthened. That is why we need your help. While ICWA is the gold standard of child welfare and despite its overwhelming success and importance, Native children are overrepresented in the foster care system. Compared to white children, Indian children are four times more likely to be removed from their homes and placed into foster care.<sup>2</sup> Forty years later, ICWA is just as important as it was the day it was signed into law.

There are also ways Congress can strengthen ICWA. I encourage you to support legislation that:

- Enforces ICWA provisions requiring states to report Indian children in custody to tribes
- Requires states to accept tribal foster home certifications, regardless of the location of the tribe
- Builds on ICWA's framework to improve child welfare laws for all children, including prioritizing family reunification and placement in the child's community

There is no cause more important to the future of our tribe, and the future of our entire country, than our children. I ask that you support efforts to strengthen ICWA, and I urge you to

be a strong advocate for improved child welfare laws in our country. Thank you for your ongoing support for Indian Country.

Sincerely, NAME

<sup>1</sup> About ICWA. (2020, January 17). Retrieved from <https://www.nicwa.org/about-icwa/>

<sup>2</sup> Disproportionality in Child Welfare. (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.nicwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Disproportionality-Table.pdf>

cc: Cherokee Nation