

National Indian Child Welfare Association

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Puyallup Indian Tribe Invests in ICWA Defense and Tribal Family Advocacy—and Challenges Other Tribes to Do the Same

(Portland, Oregon, April 5, 2018)—The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) thanks the Puyallup Indian Tribe located in Tacoma, Washington, for their generous gift in support of NICWA’s advocacy to protect vulnerable Native children and families in state child welfare systems through promoting state compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICWA acknowledges that American Indian and Alaska Native tribes have an inherent right and responsibility to protect and care for their member children and families.

While ICWA provisions like providing active efforts to keep families together or reunify them after a child was removed and placing children with extended family—Native or non-Native—have been described as the “gold standard” of child welfare policy and practice by leading national child and family advocacy groups, ICWA faces opposition from well-funded anti-tribal sovereignty groups, private adoption interests, and several states. ICWA opponents have filed several state and federal lawsuits challenging state ICWA laws and the constitutionality of ICWA. Most recently, the State of Texas, joined by the States of Indiana and Louisiana, filed a lawsuit in federal district court, *Texas v. Zinke*, challenging the constitutionality of the 2016 ICWA regulations and the statute itself. Another ICWA opponent, the Goldwater Institute, a conservative think tank in Arizona, is party to or has filed amicus briefs in 10 ICWA cases that seek to repeal the law. These court cases represent a serious threat to ICWA and to tribes.

NICWA’s advocacy plays an essential role in this fight by continuously updating and rallying Indian Country; engaging with the media in support of ICWA and tribes and in social media campaigns; implementing a public education strategy with policymakers; providing information to Native parents who are navigating state child welfare systems; and providing training and technical assistance to support strong tribal child welfare programs and collaborative tribal-state relationships. This work is made possible by crucial partners like the Puyallup Indian Tribe and community.

In presenting the grant to support NICWA’s advocacy work to defend ICWA, Chairman Bill Sterud said that the Puyallup Indian Tribe makes this gift “in honor of Dr. Verna Bartlett, who fought to protect our children and have a safe place for families and kids to go. It is an honor to be in a position to help our future generations. It is vital to protect our future generations, and we raise our hands to you for the work that you do.” The Puyallup Tribal Council challenged other tribes to stand with them to financially support NICWA’s advocacy to safeguard tribal children and protect ICWA.

NICWA Board President Gil Vigil stated, “The lawsuits endanger not only ICWA, but the fundamental sovereignty of tribes and the federal trust relationship between tribes and the federal government enshrined in treaties, the Constitution, and federal law. These actions are some of the most extreme attacks on tribal sovereignty since the termination era in the 1950s. We thank the Puyallup Tribe for their generous gift and ongoing support of Indian Country’s efforts to protect the Indian Child Welfare Act and to keep Native children safe and connected to their family, culture, and community whenever possible.”

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About the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)

NICWA works to support the safety, health, and spiritual strength of Native children along the broad continuum of their lives. The organization promotes building tribal capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect through positive systems change at the state, federal, and tribal levels. For more information, visit www.nicwa.org.