



TRIBAL AND STATE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Monday, September 18, 2023
Event Center, 3965 Sky Dancer Way NE
Belcourt, North Dakota

Representative Zachary Ista, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 10:18 a.m.

Members present: Representatives Zachary Ista, Lisa Finley-DeVille, Jim Grueneich, Dennis Johnson; Senators Tim Mathern, Dale Patten, Shawn Vedaa

Members absent: None

Others present: Representative Jayme Davis, Rollette Jamie Azure, Chairman; Elmer Davis, Vice Chairman; Council Representatives Blain Davis, Jon Jon Keplin, Chad Counts, Ron Trottier, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians
See [appendix](#) for additional persons present.

Mr. Austin Gunderson, Counsel, Legislative Council, reviewed the [Tribal and State Relations Committee - Background Memorandum](#) and the [Supplemental Rules of Operation and Procedure of the North Dakota Legislative Management](#).

TRIBAL PROJECTS

Ms. Erin Belgarde, Director, Community Innovation, Research, and Development Department, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, provided information regarding new tribal projects. She noted current projects include a new food distribution center, foster care facility, recovery and comprehensive substance abuse facility, emergency response center, two homeless shelters, and a water and trampoline park.

PRIORITY ISSUES

Chairman Azure presented testimony regarding the tribe's priority issues. He noted:

- The safety of the community is the most important priority for the tribe.
- Sections of roadway along Highway 5 are dangerous and in need of reconstruction.
- A demand for services relating to behavioral health and homelessness has increased since the pandemic.
- There are 115 homeless members living on the reservation and the tribe is seeking funding for an emergency shelter.
- The tribe is considering long-term solutions for providing recovery services and transitional housing.

In response to questions from committee members, Chairman Azure noted an emergency homeless shelter was opened last winter in Belcourt with a long-term plan to include permanent housing. He noted for the past 3 years all services being provided on the Turtle Mountain Reservation have been tribally funded.

DRUG TRAFFICKING AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Mr. Lonnie Grabowska, Director, Bureau of Criminal investigation, provided testimony relating to a cooperative agreement to provide assistance to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to combat controlled substances trafficking on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. He noted:

- The special law enforcement commission allows specific Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) agents to possess and enforce BIA jurisdiction over enrolled members and nonenrolled individuals as it relates to narcotics investigations and related criminal offenses. The commission has the support of the North Dakota

Attorney General in the continued fight against drug traffickers using tribal lands to establish a foothold for illegal drug sales.

- The special law enforcement commission started in 2018 within the Governor's government-to-government relations meeting.
- In April 2023, Chairman Azure signed a memorandum of understanding agreement to allow BCI to house a special agent in Rolla to assist BIA with drug trafficking in the region. The first special agent will be placed in Rolla this fall.

In response to questions from committee members, Chairman Azure noted narcotics have broad impacts on the reservation, including in areas such as social services, homelessness, rehabilitation, and detention centers. He noted the state and the tribe need to work together to stop the large volume of controlled substances being trafficked to the reservation.

Ms. Alysia LaCounte, General Counsel, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, presented testimony regarding correction and rehabilitation services. She noted:

- The new detention center is designed to provide additional educational, trauma, and substance abuse services.
- Her office is considering implementing alternative justice systems to combat against substance abuse and homelessness.

FOSTER CARE

Vice Chairman Davis presented testimony regarding the need for foster care services on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. He noted:

- The drug epidemic is impacting parents and their ability to provide proper parental care to their children. As a result of substance abuse, deprived children are either raised by grandparents or placed in foster care.
- Nearly 500 children are in foster care on the reservation.
- A child must be placed with a foster family within 48 to 72 hours. Three days is not enough to find proper placement for foster children on the reservation. A 24-hour-a-day foster care facility is necessary; however, acquiring proper funding has been difficult.

In response to questions from committee members, Vice Chairman Davis noted the facility was funded initially through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The primary goal of the facility is to provide emergency placements for children. The facility will be equipped with 24 beds and be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

EDUCATION

Mr. Duane Poitra, Business Manager, Belcourt School District, provided testimony regarding prevalent educational issues on the Turtle Mountain Reservation. He noted:

- The cost of education on the Turtle Mountain Reservation is much higher than in other areas in the state.
- Most students on the reservation cannot afford activity fees. The tribe has recognized school activities are a key factor in keeping students enrolled.
- It is difficult to attract new teachers to teach on the reservation; even with a competitive salary and benefit package. Due to its location, the reservation is less desirable for new teachers in hard-to-fill subject areas such as mathematics, science, special education, and English.
- 85 percent of the current teachers are local tribal members.
- Senate Bill No. 2304 (2021) provided tribes the opportunity to incorporate tribal history, traditions, and culture into their school curriculum. Research has shown a positive link between a student's success and a student's understanding of their own tribal history.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Poitra noted graduation rates are not at the desired level; however, elementary and high school test scores have increased.

No further business appearing, Chairman Ista adjourned the meeting at 3:08 p.m.

Austin Gunderson
Counsel

ATTACH:1