

ICWA STORYTELLING GUIDE

February 2019

PROTECT ICWA CAMPAIGN

The Protect ICWA Campaign (the Campaign) was established by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF).

This guide is designed to create awareness about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and help individuals share personal stories with colleagues, policymakers, and the media. Stories can range from a variety of positive impacts of the law, such as the long-term benefits of being raised with a distinct cultural identity as a Native person, to negative impacts when ICWA is not followed.

The Current ICWA Environment

ICWA is a long-standing federal law protecting the well-being of Native children by upholding family integrity and stability. In October 2018, the United States District Court for the Northern District of Texas ruled in *Brackeen v. Zinke* that ICWA is unconstitutional.

This ruling ignores the long-standing government-to-government relationship between tribal nations and the federal government. Tribal nations, tribal organizations, states, and other non-tribal partners are taking action to protect ICWA and end the threat of forced removal of Native children from their families, tribes, and communities. Your voice is critical in this advocacy work for Native children.



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Changing ICWA Public Opinion through Storytelling

Each of us has a story that can move people to take action. Storytelling has been a part of Native cultures since time immemorial. Today, it holds power and influences legislative decisions and public opinion. As we've learned through research like Reclaiming Native Truth, Native people and our allies are positioned to counter the dominant narratives, discrimination, and invisibility that frames Native children and families today. We need the voices of Native people and their allies elevated to change the narrative of misperceptions about Native children, families, and the laws that protect them.

Sharing Your Story in Today's Media Landscape

Sharing stories in the media or as a form of public testimony becomes part of public record and may be preserved and be discoverable in the future on the internet or social media. Deciding whether to share your experience publicly is a very personal decision. Carefully weigh the pros and cons of sharing your story with the public.

- Sharing your foster care or adoption story publicly is a big deal, especially if this is the first time you are sharing it. With so many emotions involved, it can be a difficult decision to make alone. Is there someone in your life (e.g., family member, counselor, peer) who can support you in deciding to share?
- Additionally, be mindful of how you include others in your story. When you include others, even by a simple mention, you are telling a piece of their story as well. We recommend maintaining others' privacy by not mentioning names or identifying information unless consent is given.

Native Communities Educating the Public

For examples of effective messages about ICWA, read the ICWA Talking Points Guide and watch the *Heart of ICWA* video series on NICWA's YouTube channel. Connect with the Protect ICWA Campaign. We can:

- Support individuals with guidance to connect their ICWA story to traditional media outlets
- Support amplifying stories to new media, like blogs, podcasts, webinars, and e-communications, and share widely through social media efforts
- Provide support and one-on-one training

Resources for Youth

-  #ThingsToConsider Strategic Sharing—Developed by Youth Move National
-  Strategic Sharing Workbook—Developed by the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health



ICWA & NATIVE YOUTH STORYTELLING

Native Youth Voice & ICWA

In October 2018, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Youth Commission were inspired to get involved in the ICWA conversation after learning about the *Brackeen v. Zinke* case. They felt it was important to have policymakers, judges, and the general public understand their perspective and hear their voice. Developed by consensus during a writing session during the NCAI conference, the NCAI Youth Commission released the following statement.

//////////////////// NCAI Youth Commission Statement

The Indian Child Welfare Act was created in order to protect the best interest of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of tribal communities and families. We, as youth leaders, know that our identity is who we are, is within our culture, and within the tribal community that raises us. Our membership and blood quantum has never defined us as members of our tribal communities. To us, we are raised by tribal communities, because we learn not just from our family but from the communities as a whole. They teach us our languages, our traditions, they show us who we are as American Indian/Alaska Native youth; that is a right every American Indian/Alaska Native child should have. They should not be taken from their tribal communities because when they are, a piece of our culture is lost.

With the assistance of the Protect ICWA Campaign, the Native youth were also given a training on the history and ongoing need for ICWA. Below are key talking points and tips to engage with Native youth in your community to support their storytelling.

Native youth are standing together and raising their voices to protect each other, their connection to their families, and their inherent need to be raised within their culture.

Native Youth Talking Points by Native Youth

- We are raised not only by our families, but by our tribal communities as a whole.
- Being raised in a tribal community gives us the opportunity to learn our languages and our traditions, and supports us in who we are as Native youth.
- Blood quantum does not define our connection to our culture.
- Losing our culture is not an option.
- We support the Indian Child Welfare Act because it protects our stability and security as Native youth.
- The media tells their own narrative and not the Native youth story.

Engage with Native Youth Voice

- Host a Native youth roundtable with your community to discuss ICWA
- Have an open dialogue with the following prompting questions:
 - Are child welfare services at the tribe important to you? Why?
 - What parts of your culture are most important to you?
 - Why is it important for you to be a part of your community?



QUESTIONS? CONTACT THE PROTECT ICWA CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

National Indian Child Welfare Association | www.nicwa.org

National Congress of American Indians | www.ncai.org

Association on American Indian Affairs | www.indian-affairs.org

Native American Rights Fund | www.narf.org



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