

*The  
Latest Inside:*  
**Honoring  
the Sacred**



# NICWA NEWS

Quarterly Newsletter • Spring 2025





**NICWA**  
National Indian Child Welfare Association  
Protecting Our Children • Preserving Our Culture

## National Indian Child Welfare Association

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[www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)

The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) protects the safety, health, and cultural identity of Native children and families today and for future generations. NICWA strengthens tribal capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect, advances policies that uphold tribal sovereignty, and promotes Native-led, culturally grounded approaches to child welfare.

Through advocacy, coalition-building, workforce training, and technical assistance to improve service systems, NICWA works at the tribal, local, state, and national levels to ensure that Native children can thrive within their families and communities.

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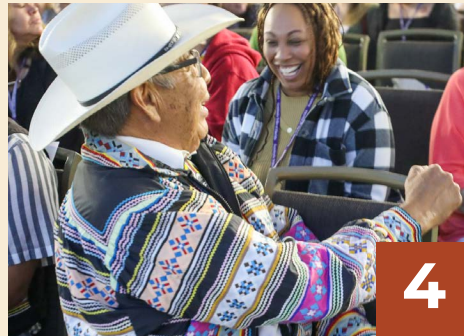
Roxy Sprowl (*Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians*)

Stephanie Weldon (*Yurok Tribe*)

Steven Wilson, Jr. (*Oglala Sioux Tribe*)

### Executive Director

Sarah Kastelic (*Alutiiq*)



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NICWA News is the quarterly newsletter for members and donors of the National Indian Child Welfare Association. Membership is available in multiple levels starting at \$35. For reprint requests, additional copies, or other information, contact us at [info@nicwa.org](mailto:info@nicwa.org).

# Message from the Executive Director

**Dear NICWA Members, Sponsors, Donors, and Friends,**

Welcome to the Spring issue of NICWA News. This issue embraces the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference theme, Honoring the Sacred.

The theme ***Honoring the Sacred*** reflects the value Indigenous peoples have placed on their children, families, and traditions for generations. To regard something as “sacred” shows respect and is characterized as something we hold close to our hearts, something to be protected and sheltered. Honoring the sacred is acknowledging and respecting the interconnectedness of relationships between all elements in our world. Each year, we witness the thousands of dedicated tribal and state professionals and passionate advocates who devote their lives to protecting tribal communities and their sacred citizens. This unified effort is manifested in our constant advocacy to preserve children’s connections to family, community, and a healthy and secure cultural identity.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) gives Native children in state systems the opportunity to maintain those sacred connections to their family and community where possible, mirroring the values of our traditional cultures. ICWA 2050 is a unifying national framework for a future where tribal child welfare programs and services are strengthened and the protections of ICWA are secured for generations to come. It is a unifying vision for the well-being of Native children spanning decades and sectors. ICWA 2050 is our commitment to a future where Native children are woven into the fabric of our cultures with care and intention, protecting the sacred. It is a generation of work to change the trajectory of generations of Native children.

As you’ll read in this issue, we’ve just wrapped up our incredibly successful 43<sup>rd</sup> annual conference, where we welcomed 1,918 people. There was excitement about NICWA’s refreshed brand, including a beautiful redesign of our classic cradleboard logo and our newly launched website. We gratefully acknowledged 30 sponsors who generously contributed \$160,200 to create this enriching experience. A gathering of service providers, community members, and advocates over four days of learning, networking, and celebration together, the conference furthered NICWA’s mission to protect the safety, health, and cultural identity of all Native children and families—today and for future generations—by upholding culturally based services, community strength, and tribal sovereignty.

Our conference is a powerful reminder of the commitment and impact of the workers in our tribal and state helping programs and systems. We hope you’ll mark your calendar now for the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on March 29- April 1, 2026.

With gratitude for your service to Native children and families,

*Sarah L. Kastelic*

Sarah L. Kastelic, PhD, MSW  
(Alutiiq)



***"Honoring  
the sacred is  
acknowledging  
and respecting the  
interconnectedness  
of relationships  
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our world."***







## Trump Administration Executive Orders Concern Tribal Communities

President Trump has signed over 140 executive orders and directives in his first 100 days in office. While most of these executive orders do not target specific policies and funding that tribal nations depend upon, several do, and the impacts of these executive orders are concerning for Native children and families. You can find detailed descriptions and analysis of executive orders impacting Native children and families [here](#) and a full list of executive orders [here](#).

The focus of executive orders that impact tribal human services fall into three categories: (1) eliminating programs and policies that are determined to be diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) oriented, (2) restructuring federal agencies and staffing of federal programs, and (3) development and implementation of regulatory policy that guides federal programs and laws. **Of great importance in all of these executive orders is how they impact the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations.** The trust responsibility of the United States is a legal



and moral obligation to protect treaty rights, land, assets, and resources of tribal nations. It includes providing for the well-being of Native people through basic services and upholding tribal sovereignty. It was established through treaties and other actions between the United States and tribal nations and recognizes the tribal right to self-determination.

The first category of executive orders focuses on DEI programs and policies. They seek to eliminate programs and policies that the Administration determines promote DEI principles. So far, this order has been interpreted extremely broadly, with numerous federal programs that fund tribal nations being swept up in the Administration's efforts to stop what they consider DEI funding or programs. This has occurred despite policy interpretations within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Department of the Interior (DOI) that exempt tribal programs and policies from DEI actions (See [DOI Secretary's Order 3415](#) and HHS Office of General Counsel's [advisory opinion](#)). These

exemptions are based on the political and trust relationship that exists between the United States and tribal nations.

A second category of executive orders is related to the reorganization of departments and staffing within the federal government. This body of executive orders is focused on reducing staffing and agencies to shrink the size of the government, while also making it easier for the federal government to terminate federal staff without cause. **The cumulative effect of these executive orders so far has been to terminate experienced staff who were providing advice and support to federal agency leadership on how to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of federal programming for tribal nations.**

The staff in these positions take years to develop deep expertise, and they possess specialized expertise that is not otherwise available through other staff. Other fallout from these executive orders has been the closing of half of the regional HHS offices and proposals to close several Bureau of Indian Affairs offices. These regional and local offices work closely with tribal nations and provide technical assistance and resources to ensure tribal nations are able to successfully operate federal programs. The HHS regional offices that were closed served 80% of tribal nations within the United States. In a leaked copy of the HHS FY 2026 budget recommendations from the Office of Management and Budget, several programs that tribal nations operate were proposed to be eliminated (see the [Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty letter](#)). Numerous federal staff in programs that were targeted for elimination have already been fired, leaving tribal nations with no one with any connection to their communities or programs available to assist them.

The third category of executive orders proposes to reduce the number of regulations that guide the implementation of laws and programs and to eliminate the public comment process in developing new regulations. In one executive order, the Administration states that for every new regulation drafted, 10 existing regulations must be repealed. This will have profound impacts on programs and policies that serve tribal communities. For example, last year Congress reauthorized a major federal child welfare law, the Supporting America's Children and Families Act (P.L. 118-258). HHS will need to issue new regulations to provide states and tribes with guidance on how to implement the law. To stay in compliance with the executive order, which regulations will HHS choose to repeal, and how will this impact other legal protections and programs for tribes? In another executive order, the Administration states that they will not provide for public comment in any new regulations they develop or existing ones they target for repeal. Removing public comment will allow federal agencies to make policy decisions without input or feedback from any affected parties, including tribal nations.

In response to these executive orders and other federal actions, NICWA is working closely with the [\*\*Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty\*\*](#) and non-Native children and family allies to share information as well as develop and communicate advocacy strategies. If you would like to learn more about how you can support these efforts, please contact David Simmons, Director of Government Affairs and Advocacy, at [desimmons@nicwa.org](mailto:desimmons@nicwa.org).

## Inside NICWA



### Welcome to NICWA's Newest Youth Board Member

***"Her advocacy focuses on uplifting and centering cultural connections, familial ties, and identities of Indigenous foster youth..."***



Elected this Spring, **Roxy Sprowl** (Bezhigonoodinkwe) is NICWA's newest youth board member. Roxy is a proud citizen of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians. She holds a BSW from Michigan State University and is pursuing her MSW at the University of Michigan as a Child Welfare Program Scholar.

As a former foster youth, consultant, and public speaker, **Roxy is passionate about Indian child welfare, education reform, and transforming lived experience into social change through storytelling.** She has led award-winning research on racial representation in US history curricula, chaired multiple Indigenous student organizations, and completed several national internships.

She served as a member of the Michigan Indian Education Council, a national fellow with the Center for Native American Youth, and a community mentor for Indigenous youth. She is a 2023 National Udall Scholar and 2024-25 NASW Consuelo-Gosnell Scholar. Currently, Roxy works at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services in the Native American Affairs Division of the Children's Services Agency.

Her advocacy focuses on uplifting and centering cultural connections, familial ties, and identities of Indigenous foster youth through program coordination and policy reform. We're excited to welcome Roxy to the NICWA board for a three-year term.



# Honoring the Sacred: NICWA's 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference



43<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
**Protecting Our  
Children Conference**  
**Honoring the Sacred**  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA | MARCH 30–APRIL 2, 2025

On March 31–April 2, 2025, NICWA board, staff, and 1,918 conference registrants gathered in Orlando, Florida for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference. On Sunday night, Jill Kehaulani Esch keynoted the Annual Membership Reception and Meeting, a fun evening to reflect on our collective impact and better get to know one another.

Emceed by NICWA board members Patricia Carter-Goodheart and Tessa Baldwin, the opening plenary session on Monday brought welcomes from Seminole Tribe of Florida President Holly Tiger and Miccosukee Tribal Council Secretary William J. Osceola.

NICWA board Vice-President Angela Connor and Executive Director Sarah Kastelic set the stage for our time together, and Senior Program Director Tara Reynon moderated a plenary panel where speakers Rose Domnick, Steven Wilson Jr., and William J. Osceola described their thoughts and cultural teachings about what it means to honor the sacred.



remembering open knowledge reclaiming  
live work earth ceremonies  
elders protecting one ancestor's building  
stories honoring connection ancestral  
saving spirit means best honor language  
giving youth family putting life together healing  
land traditions selves self loving sacred true carrying  
support culture share teach respecting future love hope  
teachings walk past respect children  
heal generations communities heart  
mother community nature ancestors people present  
sharing showing teaching traditional  
staying

## 2025 Conference by the Numbers

<b>3</b> days	<b>3</b> Amazing keynote panels	<b>5.5</b> Hours of virtual content	<b>14.5</b> CEU credits	<b>4,056</b> Cups of coffee served	<b>52</b> Volunteers
<b>42</b> Exhibitors	<b>30</b> Sponsors	<b>55</b> States & Provinces	<b>74</b> Workshops	<b>134</b> Speakers	<b>378</b> Tribal Nations represented
<b>974</b> First-time attendees	<b>1,008</b> New NICWA Members	<b>1,918</b> Participants	<b>2</b> Baby gators	<b>\$25,762</b> Given during Paddle Raise	<b>\$160,200</b> Sponsorship support raised



**On day two, NICWA board members posthumously honored founding NICWA board President Gary Peterson** with a Lifetime Achievement Award, recalling his perseverance, tireless advocacy, and selfless service for our communities as well as his warm heart and good humor. Yvonne Peterson accepted the award on behalf of their family.

Also on Tuesday, NICWA friend and partner Janeen Comenote, CEO of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition, moderated a panel of speakers representing urban Indian centers across the country who spoke about their service array and delivery system, the importance of community and tribal relationships, and the importance of advocacy.

**Seventy-four workshops** addressing a wide range of topics and issues were offered over the three-day period. The Annual Banquet dinner on Tuesday night included honoring our annual Champions for Native Children- Cheri Goodwin (Red Lake Nation) and the Colorado River Indian Tribes Office of Social Services, a successful fundraising paddle raise, and high-energy fun and entertainment provided by Supaman.

The closing plenary panel on Wednesday featured both new and long-time NICWA partners sharing about their role in the **ICWA 2050** plan that the Protect ICWA Campaign launched last fall. They sent participants home inspired and with an invitation to determine what could contribute to facilitating the systems change we need over the next generation to change the outcomes for generations of Native kids in the future.







*With permission from the Indigenous Child & Family Service Directors Our Children Our Way Society, we are reprinting their letter to NICWA congratulating us on the 2025 Protecting Our Children Conference and acknowledging our shared cause and commitment.*

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

**As you embark on your 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children conference, we want you to know that our hearts, spirits and energy are with you.** We want to thank you for providing this valuable opportunity to exchange knowledge and share wise practices and lived experiences. This annual gathering is immeasurably valuable in fulfilling our shared and sacred responsibility of serving our children, youth and families.

We deeply appreciate NICWA's unwavering commitment and tireless efforts in championing the rights and well-being of Indigenous children and families. Your dedication to strengthening communities and advancing policies that uphold the sacred bonds of family and culture is truly commendable. The impact of your work reverberates across generations, ensuring that children remain connected to their communities, cultures, and identities.

We also recognize the immense challenges that tribes in the United States are currently facing. In these difficult times, please know that the Our Children Our Way Society stands in steadfast support of your mission and the communities you serve. Though we may be separated by borders, our hearts, spirits and commitment to our shared cause remain united. We stand with you and hold up our hands to you, our brothers and sisters, as you continue to advocate for the rights and futures of Indigenous children and families.

Mussi cho,  
Mary Teegee – Maaxswxw Gibuu  
Chair, ICFSD Our Children Our Way Society

***"Though we may be separated  
by borders, our hearts, spirits  
and commitment to our shared  
cause remain united."***





# The Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty

**Since January 2025, NICWA has partnered with numerous national and regional intertribal organizations to educate the new Administration and Congress and advocate for the interests of tribal nations.** In April, the coalition of 28 organizations formally organized as the Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty, a collaborative alliance that serves as a powerful unifying voice of regional and national inter-tribal policy-oriented, nonprofit organizations to engage with federal policymakers on critical issues affecting the sovereign interests, rights, and authorities of tribal nations, tribal citizens, and community members across the US.

The Coalition was formed to ensure that actions by the Trump Administration and Congress recognize tribal nations' sovereign governmental status and the United States' longstanding trust and treaty obligations. The purpose of the Coalition is to articulate and advance the critical objectives and principles that guide collective efforts in advocating for tribal nations' inherent sovereign rights and authorities and its government-to-government relationship with the United States.

In an era of shifting political landscapes and evolving federal priorities, it is imperative to establish a clear and unified voice to safeguard collective interests and uphold the sacred trust and treaty relationship between tribal nations, tribal citizens, community members, and the United States.

The Coalition endeavors to: (1) ensure the US fulfills its trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations; (2) provide strong, accurate, and timely education about the origins and basis of government-to-government relations; (3) lead with an unwavering commitment to reinforcing our sovereignty principles and the foundations of our nation-to-nation relationship, including crafting communications acknowledging current administrative and congressional realities with the goal of securing a seat at decision-making tables and to exert positive influence; (4) safeguard the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of tribal nations, ensuring the recognition, honor, and protection of their unique nation-to-nation diplomatic relationships with the United States; and (5) establish a proactive, rapid response entity to act collaboratively in tribal nations' best interest.

**You can learn more about the Coalition and our efforts in real-time on our website at <https://coalitionfortribalsovereignty.org/>.**



***"...it is imperative to establish a clear and unified voice to safeguard collective interests and uphold the sacred trust and treaty relationship..."***



## Upcoming NICWA Trainings

2025 Schedule	Training Topics
June 3-5, 2025 Portland, Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive Indian Parenting</li><li>• Working With Substance Abusing Families</li></ul>
July 7 – 10, 2025 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive Indian Parenting</li></ul>
August 14, 2025 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice</li></ul>
September 16 – 18, 2025 Portland, Oregon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive Indian Parenting</li><li>• Understanding ICWA</li></ul>
September 25, 2025 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Casework Practice</li></ul>
October 20-23, 2025 Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive Indian Parenting</li></ul>



## REGISTER TODAY!

Visit [www.nicwa.org](http://www.nicwa.org)  
or scan the QR code  
for more information.



## Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare Training Returns Online this August

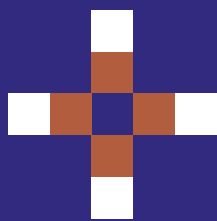
NICWA's virtual Foundations of Tribal Child Welfare (FTCW) training is an interactive, engaging one-day class designed to increase practical skills related to the basic responsibilities of tribal child welfare. FTCW is a great resource for new frontline child welfare workers, supervisors, and directors, as well as experienced workers looking for a refresher on tribal child welfare fundamentals and how to best work with families.

Navigating legal and child welfare systems can be a messy and bureaucratic process; FTCW helps to clarify these processes by identifying information essential to the life cycle of a case and what is necessary to include in court reports. Utilizing NICWA's Relational Worldview model, case workers can explore how to assess and engage the children and families they serve in a holistic, supportive, strengths-based manner.

Over the course of the day, participants will learn about internalized bias and historical trauma's impacts on an individual and systemic basis, the importance of program collaboration in meeting families' needs, use of the Relational Worldview model in case planning with families, and how to prepare for court and giving testimony.

FTCW is a wonderful way to get back in touch with the basics while deepening an understanding of key approaches and resources in tribal child welfare. NICWA's next FTCW training will take place on August 14, 2025, via Zoom from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

For more information, visit  
NICWA's website or reach  
out to [training@nicwa.org](mailto:training@nicwa.org).







## Supporting Thriving Native Families

In this issue of NICWA News, we're proud to celebrate our dedicated community of supporters who made our 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual Protecting Our Children Conference inspiring and successful, including the 276 generous donors who helped us raise over \$25,500 during this year's paddle raise fundraiser at our banquet dinner. From long-time supporters to new donors, each of you play a vital role in advancing our mission.

Thank you for your generosity. To learn more about how you can give and raise awareness for NICWA's mission, visit [www.nicwa.org/ways-to-give/](http://www.nicwa.org/ways-to-give/).

### Here's what some of our Paddle Raise donors had to say...

**Matilda W.**



Cedar City, UT  
NICWA donor since 2024

*Dedicated to Honovi, my granddaughter who is 6 years old. All for a good cause.*

**Anonymous**



*In honor of Cheri Goodwin. For extraordinary tribal child welfare leadership!*

### Here's what inspires some annual and new NICWA donors to support our mission:

**Anonymous**



*I want to help make the world a better place for children.*

**Anonymous**

*I am supporting NICWA because NICWA supports the good work my husband does as a tribal attorney. Thank you to all of NICWA for the good work you do every day!*

**Anonymous**



*It is time we heal the wounds of racism and white supremacy.*

**Anonymous**

*The work of the oppressed never ends. May we continue to fight the good fight.*



= First-time NICWA Donor



= NICWA Member

**Shannon C.**



Hovland, MN  
NICWA donor since 2008

*For my grandchildren, and now great grandchildren, and all the children. I will raise my paddle and encourage others to do so as well.*

**Rhonda K.**



Dowagiac, MI

*Marley, Azhinis, and Aria. You are loved and never forgotten.*

**Jennifer C.**



Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, Redmond, WA  
NICWA donor and member since 2009

*To support ICWA 2050! It is so important to keep indigenous families together to be able to maintain our culture and traditions. NICWA provides the vital support needed to accomplish that goal. Nashúun oyk lóovaq (my heart is grateful to you)!*

**Thank you to all of our donors and members for helping advance our vision for thriving Native children and families—today and for generations to come.**



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