

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Nebraska Native American child welfare nonprofit mobiles to protect ICWA;

Hosts statewide convening on April 29 to discuss impact of *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*

BLOOMFIED, Nebraska – April xx, 2019 – Looking to provide clarity and mobilize after a challenge to a Native American child adoption law, the **Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition (NICWC)** will host a meeting with Nebraska tribes and state and judicial social services and representatives on **April 29**.

The 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requires states to place Native American children in foster care with families of the children's tribe and take several actions before removing them from their homes. The federal law has encountered more than a dozen constitutionally challenges, including the most recent case, *Brackeen v. Bernhardt*, where a non-Native American Texas couple filed a lawsuit to keep a Native child who was placed in their care.

Nebraska is one of six states nationwide that has adopted its own ICWA statutes. While the state has its own law, much more remains to be done to comply with ICWA and Native child welfare, said NICWC Executive Director Misty Frazier. Native American children in Nebraska are 2.5 times more likely to be placed in the foster care system than non-Native American children. Native girls are also 20 times more likely to be court-ordered to the state's juvenile facility, according to a state Foster Care Review Board 2017-2018 Annual Report.

"While we've made progress as a state Native children are still disproportionately a big part of the foster care system," said Frazier, former social service director for the Santee Sioux Nation. "There are still a lot of gaps in service, too many barriers and a lack of education among caseworkers and within the local court systems."

Frazier is among several child welfare representatives from the Omaha, Ponca, Santee Sioux and Winnebago Tribes who created the NICWC in 2011 to address gaps in the state's foster care or juvenile justice systems. The organization offers training on ICWA, foster care and caregiving, among other professional culturally integrated related services.

In the past year, NICWC has submitted guidelines to clarify the state ICWA, testifying at the Legislature, and convened a listening session of Native American families who have had children in the social services system. NICWC also sits on the Nebraska Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission, which seeks to improve Native Americans' public trust and confidence in the courts and better understanding of tribal courts.

On April 29, NICWC will host a panel with representatives from the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Winnebago and Ponca Tribal Courts and the Native American Rights Fund to discuss the *Brackeen* case and will have a facilitated discussion in the afternoon for action steps on how to protect ICWA.

The **Protecting ICWA: A Convening of Natives & Allies** event will be held at the **WinnaVegas Casino** owned by the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska in Sloan, Iowa. The discussion starts at 9 a.m. and is free and open to the public. For more information, go to www.nicwc.org.

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About the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition

The Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Coalition (NICWC) was created by the Ponca, Omaha, Santee Sioux Nation and Winnebago Tribes of Nebraska in partnership with legal and social service nonprofits in 2011 to be the voice for Native children and tribes before being placed in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. NICWC provides education and training about Indian cultures and the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). For more information, go to www.nicwc.org.