



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

3211 Fourth Street, NE 202.541.3000
Washington, DC usccb.org
20017

March 16, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Vice Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski and Senator Schatz:

As chairmen of several U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) committees, we write in support of the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (S. 761). We urge the Senate to advance this important legislation.

In July 2024, our predecessors [wrote to Congress](#) stating “unequivocally that the tragic history of the boarding school period should be brought to light in order to pave the way for healing of impacted Indigenous communities” and that “[w]e are committed to concrete actions to restore trust and cultivate healing and the reconciliation that the Church desires.”

In that letter, two points were raised for consideration regarding the structure of the previous version of the legislation. We appreciate your efforts to incorporate that feedback, which we believe will facilitate efforts to bring the truth forward and contribute to healing and reconciliation.

In particular, the exclusion of a broad subpoena power will invite greater cooperative, transparent participation across government, secular, and religious institutions to properly begin and carry forward the process of truth, healing, and justice. The addition of three seats to the Federal and Religious Truth and Healing Advisory Committee, designated for representatives of religious communities that have historic ties to this era, invites those communities to enter formally into this dialogue as established stakeholders invested in the commission’s outcome. This direct participation from the Catholic Church and other faith traditions will also help to better facilitate requests for records. True healing and reconciliation are only possible through the involvement of all relevant parties.

The forced removal of children from their tribal lands and communities as part of federal boarding school policies was a moral failure that disregarded the unique culture and dignity of Indigenous peoples. Accounts from this era illustrate lasting trauma among those who were involuntarily brought to these schools. The pain from the Native American boarding school era continues to echo today. As stated in the USCCB’s Pastoral Framework, [Keeping Christ’s Sacred Promise: A pastoral Framework for Indigenous Ministry](#), “The Church recognizes that it has played a part in traumas experienced by Native children.”

As Pope Francis stated clearly in 2022, “Without real indignation, without historical memory and without a commitment to learning from past mistakes, problems remain unresolved and



keep coming back.” If enacted, we believe S. 761 would help to build up that historical memory essential to learning and healing.

As we continue to encourage greater access to and understanding of this painful history, the Catholic Church in the United States remains committed to transparency, to listening, and to humility. We remain dedicated to working with Native communities, government actors, and other religious traditions in efforts to bring about authentic healing and reconciliation. As one means of promoting this, we urge the Senate to favorably advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Archbishop of Louisville
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Most Reverend John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo
Chairman, Subcommittee on Native
American Affairs

Most Reverend Robert J. Brennan
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Committee on Cultural
Diversity in the Church

Most Rev. Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond
Chairman, Committee on the Protection of
Children and Young People

CC: The Honorable Steve Daines
The Honorable John Hoeven
The Honorable Jerry Moran
The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
The Honorable Mike Rounds
The Honorable Maria Cantwell
The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto
The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan
The Honorable Tina Smith