

Free the Lakota Children

Petition by [Lakota People's Law Project](#)

To be delivered to **President Barack Obama**

I urge President Obama to stop state kidnapping by South Dakota!

The time has come to empower the Lakota tribes to have their own child and family service programs.

PETITION BACKGROUND

As clearly documented in the new short web video “Hearts on the Ground,” by Sundance award-winning director Kalyanee Mam (just released at www.LakotaLaw.org/action), the epidemic of child taking by the State of South Dakota is tearing thousands of Lakota Sioux families apart.

Every day, Lakota grandmothers are illegally denied their right to foster their own grandchildren. The South Dakota Dept. of Social Services rejects grandmothers for such trivial reasons as too few rooms in a home, too small of a home, too old, decades old crimes, and even rumors.

South Dakota continues to violate the federal law by placing 90% of the 750 Lakota foster children it seizes each year into non-Native homes and facilities, instead of with relatives or tribal homes. Both federal law and the United Nations define this behavior as genocide. Only tribal programs are placing foster children with their relatives.

President Obama has the authority to order three federal agencies (the Department of the Interior, the Department of Justice and Department of Health and Human Services), to provide resources to train and develop tribal family service programs and foster care systems for the nine Lakota Sioux tribal Councils. Within a short time, the \$60 million in federal funds that currently go to the State of South Dakota’s Department of Social Services to illegally remove Indian children and force them into foster care can instead be spent and managed by the tribes, as they work to keep children with relatives, while restoring tribal sovereignty.

Lakota children are more than ten times more likely to be forcibly removed from their parents than Caucasian children, and now comprise about 60% of all foster children in the state. In more than 90% of the cases, simply alleged “neglect,” as opposed to sexual or physical abuse, is given as the reason for the forced taking, sometimes at gunpoint, sometimes while at school, or in the middle of the night. Poverty equals “neglect” in the mind of the State workers.

What is happening to Lakota children and families in South Dakota today is precisely the sort of activity that Congress intended to stop when it passed the Indian Child Welfare Act (“ICWA”) of 1978. The Act mandates that when states remove Native American children from their parents, they must be placed with relatives from their extended family, or with other members of their tribe, or with members of other tribes. Only when an active effort for such placements fail are

states allowed to place Native Americans in White foster homes, or state run foster care facilities.

The Department of Social Services in South Dakota continues to deny child placements to willing and capable relatives, while “stripping” parents of all parental rights to ever see their children again, for “violations” as trivial as failing to show up at parenting classes.

South Dakota designates every Native child in its foster care system as “special needs,” receiving up to \$79,000 from the federal government for their care annually, and then forcing many to take mind-altering drugs, even some as young as 18 months of age. Medicare spending for foster care child prescriptions in South Dakota increased more than 1,000 percent in the recent decade, while suicide rates for young Lakota children are 12 times the national average, and among the highest in the world. Some of the suicides are clearly related to the forced medications.

More than a century after being forced from their ancestral lands onto reservations, the 70,000 members of the Lakota Sioux nation remain the poorest, most oppressed people in the United States.

Let's turn around 150 years of cruel abuse to Lakota families. Please sign this petition and tell President Obama to instruct his agencies to help the tribes bring the Lakota children home!