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Court Administrator

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By BH Deputy

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To: Special Master, the Honorable Kathleen Blatz

From: Suzanne Koeplinger, Executive Director, Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center  
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Re: Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center (MIWRC) essential services

**Summary:** MIWRC provides core services to American Indian women and children in the Twin Cities Metro area. All state contracts with MIWRC should continue to be funded during the shut-down because they are vital to the health, safety and well being of this population. During the 2005 partial state shut-down, all these programs were declared essential, core services for continued funding by the Special Master.

American Indians suffer the highest disparities of any group in the state, including historic trauma and multi-generational poverty. Native women are raped three times as often as any group, according to Amnesty International, yet the U.S. Dept of Justice estimates that 70 % of sexual assaults against Native women are not reported. The resulting traumas endured by the majority of women we serve require the culturally based interventions the community has come to rely on from MIWRC.

Our State Contracts

**Sexual Assault Advocacy:** MIWRC has the only state funded (OJP) sexual assault advocate for Native women in the Minnesota. During 2010 she served 212 victims of sexual assault, including 28 children. She holds exit planning sessions for Native women incarcerated at the Adult Correctional Facility, a majority of whom are victims of sex trafficking. Loss of her funding will mean rape victims who traditionally do not report to law enforcement but do report to MIWRC staff will not receive healing services, incarcerated women will be more likely to return to the streets, and re-victimization is a high likelihood. The secondary trauma of sexual violence leads to increased chemical addiction, mental illness, homelessness and child protection interventions. (\$43,000 annually)

**Healing Journey and Oskinigiikwe (young woman in the Ojibwe language):** These two unique harm reduction programs work with late stage, chronic alcoholic Native adults (Healing Journey) and girls (Oskinigiikwe) who are being recruited into gangs, are homeless, or have been commercially sexually exploited. The stabilization of these clients and case management services help to find safe housing, treatment, small scale job skill and life skill building, and provide the only hope for many of the clients. In 2010 Healing Journey served 120 adults and Oskinigiikwe 110 girls. Without these services the women

*To empower American Indian women and families to exercise their cultural values and integrity, and to achieve sustainable life ways, while advocating for justice and equity.*

and girls are more likely to be recruited into gangs, become pregnant, engage in law enforcement and emergency room use, relapse and additional victimization. (\$100,000 annually)

**Indian Child Welfare Act Coordination (ICWA):** MIWRC is one of four state ICWA providers and works closely with Minnesota tribes and county child protection teams to ensure compliance with federal ICWA law and bring healing, preservation and reunification to Native families in the child welfare system. MIWRC staff in 2010 worked with 153 parents and 324 children, and had a 90 % success rate for preservation of families. Without the culturally based case management many families will have TPR results. Long term foster care outcomes for Native youth are notoriously poor. The loss of this service to Minnesota's Native families will have a devastating impact on Minnesota's tribal children. (\$90,000 annually)

**The Learning Center:** this is an alcohol/tobacco and other drug (ATOD) prevention program that served over 600 individuals in 2010 with critical training and information on diabetes, depression, sex trafficking and other topics. In addition, the center is a resource for Native women seeking jobs and provides internet access to the community. Education is our strength and key element of the trust agreements with the Nation's Tribes. John Quincy Adams said, "to furnish the means of acquiring knowledge is the greatest benefit that can be conferred on mankind. It promotes life itself and enlarges the sphere of existence". (\$160,000 annually)

**The disparities:**

American Indian women are more likely to be homeless, chemically dependent, mentally ill, engaged in the child protection system and suffer chronic, life threatening trauma and illness than any group. Our 2009 research report indicates they are being trafficked into prostitution at alarming rates.

- Nearly 42 % of American Indian families in Hennepin County live under the poverty line.
- Wilder Research reports that 48 % of Native women ages 18 – 21 were victims of gender violence within the past 12 months, and 31 % of that age group were homeless due to violence in the home.
- 63 % of MIWRC clients in select programs had been trafficked into prostitution when they were between the ages of 8 – 17
- 43% of Native 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls reported that a family member's alcohol use caused health problems, and 34% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade Native girls thought about suicide within the past 12 months (MN Student Survey, 2007)

These are our women and girls. This is who will be hurt by the elimination of these programs. MIWRC's outcomes for all programs are consistently positive, in fact we have waiting lists for all programs. Please rule these services as essential services that must continue to be funded during a state shut-down.

Thank you;  
Suzanne Koeplinger  
Executive Director

