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75  
INDIAN CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM

HEARINGS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON  
INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
NINETY-THIRD CONGRESS  
SECOND SESSION  
ON  
PROBLEMS THAT AMERICAN INDIAN FAMILIES FACE IN  
RAISING THEIR CHILDREN AND HOW THESE PROBLEMS  
ARE AFFECTED BY FEDERAL ACTION OR INACTION

APRIL 8 AND 9, 1974



Printed for the use of the  
Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs

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## INDIAN CHILD WELFARE PROGRAM

MONDAY, APRIL 8, 1974

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
OF THE COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, D.C.*

The subcommittee met at 9 a.m., pursuant to notice, in room 3110 Dirksen Office Building, Hon. James Abourezk presiding.

Present: Senators Abourezk and Bartlett.

Also present: Jerry T. Verkler, staff director, and Forrest Gerard, professional staff member.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES ABOUREZK, A U.S. SENATOR  
FROM THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA**

Senator ABOUREZK. The Indian Affairs Subcommittee hearings on Indian child welfare is now in session.

We have called these hearings today to begin to define the specific problems that American Indian families face in raising their children and how these problems are affected by Federal action or inaction. Many Americans and the Congress are becoming more aware of the difficulties Indian communities face in a broad range of areas: Health, education, land and water rights, economic development, among others. But there are few who are knowledgeable about the difficulties American Indians face in a matter of vital concern to them; namely the welfare of their children and their families.

It appears that for decades Indian parents and their children have been at the mercy of arbitrary or abusive action of local, State, Federal, and private agency officials. Unwarranted removal of children from their homes is common in Indian communities. Recent statistics show, for example, that a minimum of 25 percent of all Indian children are either in foster homes, adoptive homes, and/or boarding schools, against the best interest of families, tribes, and Indian communities. Whereas most non-Indian communities can expect to have children out of their natural homes in foster or adoptive homes at a rate of 1 per every 51 children, Indian communities know that their children will be removed at rates varying from 5 to 25 times higher than that.

Because of poverty and discrimination Indian families face many difficulties, but there is no reason or justification for believing that these problems make Indian parents unfit to raise their children; nor is there any reason to believe that the Indian community itself cannot, within its own confines, deal with problems of child neglect when they do arise. Up to now, however, public and private welfare agencies seem to have operated on the premise that most Indian children would