

## ICWA Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

**Date:** July 23, 2025

**Time:** 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM CT

**Location:** DSS Kneip Building, Pierre, SD – Conference Room #3

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### 1. Call to Order & Welcome

**Time:** 10:00 AM CT

**Facilitator:** Cabinet Secretary Matt Althoff, Department of Social Services

- Welcomed attendees to the second annual ICWA Advisory Council meeting.
- Reiterated the purpose of the Council: to foster collaboration, identify concerns, and improve outcomes for Native American youth in South Dakota's child welfare system.
- Clarified that the Council is an advisory body under open meeting provisions but not open to the public; notes will be published.
- Emphasized the value of vulnerability and trust-building among members.
- Encouraged flexibility in meeting location to support tribal member participation.

### Discussion – Meeting Format & Transparency

- **OST Vice President Alicia Mousseau** asked how follow-up meetings would be structured and whether they would be recorded.
  - **Secretary Althoff** confirmed that while meetings don't require public broadcast, transparency would be maintained through published minutes.
  - **Representative Peri Pourier** supported maintaining minutes and ensuring the public sees State-Tribal collaboration.
  - **VP Mousseau** raised the topic of poverty and its misclassification in child welfare cases, intending to address it in future meetings.
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### 2. Introductions

Council members and attendees introduced themselves and shared their roles and perspectives:

- **Senator Tamara Grove** (District 26): Focus on child safety and kinship, from Lower Brule, Crow Creek, Rosebud areas.
- **Rep. Peri Pourier**: Seven years in legislature; values her dual perspective as legislator and mother.
- **Deborah Divine (SWO)**: 34 years in child welfare, advocating for Native children, emphasized poverty ≠ neglect.
- **Curtis Bissonette (SWO)**: Tribal Secretary, oversees 39 programs including a group home; lived experience as foster parent.
- **Alicia Mousseau (OST VP)**: Oversees OST Task Force; committed to improving child welfare through community engagement.
- **Donita Loudner (CCST)**: Tribal ICWA Director; kinship caregiver; prioritizes family reunification.
- **Jessica Morson (FSST)**: ICWA Coalition Chairwoman; coordinates services in Flandreau; advocates for cultural identity.
- **Michelle Harrison (SRST)**: 20+ years experience; passionate about supporting Native families.
- **Diane Garreau (CRST)**: Former law enforcement; now ICWA Director; working to rebuild internal child protection systems.
- **Teresa Nieto (BIA)**: Tribal program advocate; brings state, tribal, and BIA experience.
- **Chrissie Young (CPCM)**: Affiliated with Yankton Sioux Tribe; works in prevention and child maltreatment research.
- **Tiffany Wolfgang (DSS)**: New Chief of Children and Family Services; oversees CPS, EA, and Child Support.
- **Pamela Bennett (DSS)**: 40 years in child welfare; now State CPS Division Director.
- **Jeremy Lippert (DSS Legal), Becky Nelson (OLA), Brenna Koedam (Behavioral Health), Sara Sheppick (CPS), Joe Ashley (ICWA)** also introduced themselves.

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### 3. Facilitated Discussion

**Topic:** “What is working, what are your efforts, and what needs to change?”

**Hopeful Signs and Progress**

- **Senator Grove:** Recognized impact of Indian Adoption Project and Relocation era; kinship is critical and should be prioritized over adoption.
  - **Jessica Morson:** Encouraged by prioritization of kin placements.
  - **Curtis Bissonette:** Advocated for leadership collaboration and open-mindedness; noted improvement in State-Tribal relations.
  - **Diane Garreau:** Reported positive relationships with local CPS offices; rebuilding internal Child Protection Team.
  - **Jessica Morson:** Valued that the words “Indian” and “Native American” can now be spoken openly; preserving child identity is crucial.
  - **Alicia Mousseau:** Praised the strength of tribal leadership and their knowledge of rights; discussed OST’s new data system, TIWAHE Program, foster home recruitment.
  - **Deborah Divine:** Announced opening of “The Lighthouse,” a new SWO group home; developing kinship licensing addendum.
  - **Representative Pourier:** Noted children’s resilience as a reason for continued work.
  - **Secretary Althoff:** Shared observations from ride-alongs—children’s strength in crisis affirmed need for kinship and quality placements.
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#### 4. Systemic Challenges Identified

- **Deborah Divine:** SWO denied a case transfer; tribe now keeps documentation to show children they fought for them.
- **Jessica Morson:** Asked “What is the goal?”—advocated Council focus on Indian children and ICWA.
- **Secretary Althoff:** Legislative involvement offers structure; group can shape its own goals and advocate for broader changes beyond federal ICWA.
- **Jessica Morson:** Emphasized ICWA’s active efforts to prevent removal as central to reform.
- **VP Mousseau:** Advocated for ICWA training for law enforcement and specialized ICWA courts in Pennington and Minnehaha Counties.
  - Noted OST’s internal ICWA court efforts.

- Inviting Sheldon Spotted Elk (Casey Family Programs) to present on ICWA courts in October.
  - **Secretary Althoff:** UJS must be part of ICWA court discussions.
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## 5. Additional Concerns and Observations

- **VP Mousseau:** OST opened an ICWA Advocacy Center in Pennington County, open to all tribes.
  - **VP Mousseau:** Poverty is misclassified as abuse; advocates toward tribal resource navigators for families. Data access can create delays for grant applications for tribes.
  - **Jessica Morson:** Stressed that tribes should run their own CPS programs.
  - **Curtis Bissonette:** Emphasized keeping children central to discussions; root causes must be addressed.
  - **Secretary Althoff:** More investment needed to expand high-quality foster care placements.
  - **Senator Grove:** Kinship placements across state lines may face benefit eligibility issues; interested in exploring support access like SNAP/EBT.
  - **Jessica Morson:** Benefits access is case-dependent; IHS should be included for health/mental health needs.
  - **Rep. Pourier:** Emphasized need for quality foster care.
  - **Michelle Harrison:** Questioned whether all state court attorneys are trained in ICWA—unanswered due to jurisdiction (UJS).
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## 6. Next Steps

**Facilitator:** Secretary Althoff

- Asked, “Where do we go from here?”
- **Deborah Divine** proposed quarterly meetings. Group supported the recommendation.

- **Teresa Nieto** encouraged review of historical ICWA Commission and Collaborative Circle as models to revive and modernize efforts.
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## **7. Topics Identified for Future Meetings**

1. ICWA data request process
  2. Demographics of ICWA cases
  3. Strategies for increasing kinship care
  4. Root causes of Indian child removal
  5. ICWA Courts: viability and structure
  6. Law enforcement roles and ICWA training
  7. Poverty vs. neglect— examine assessment protocols and family supports
  8. Review of historical innovations (e.g., Collaborative Circle)
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## **8. Meeting Conclusion**

- **Secretary Althoff** committed to sending a follow-up survey to determine meeting cadence and key agenda items for future sessions.
- **Meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM CT**