

Press Conference Remarks of Alexis DeLaCruz

“The Native American Law Center, along with nine Havasupai students, have brought this lawsuit to safeguard Native children’s rights to the educational opportunities that are available to other students throughout the United States. As the Law Center has long been aware through our work with this community, the Havasupai Elementary School has been repeatedly neglected by the BIE. As a result, children do not have access to basic education and children with disabilities are not provided the special education services they need.

Based on my firsthand experience as an attorney at the Law Center, I have witnessed how the BIE has failed these students. The BIE has no system in place to provide special education or even to identify and evaluate students with disabilities in Havasupai – this is in clear contravention of federal law. As a result of the BIE’s failure, our clients with disabilities have been forced to have shortened school days or have even been excluded from school altogether. Students with disabilities have not received necessary services like counseling or adequate special education for years.

The NADLC is standing shoulder to shoulder with this community to hold the BIE accountable for these failures and to ensure it meets its legal obligations to the students attending the school. In the United States, we know ‘where there is a will, there is a way.’ This is an eminently fixable problem, and it is time for the BIE to fix it and provide equal educational opportunities to all Havasupai children regardless of disability.”

- Alexis DeLaCruz, staff attorney at the Native American Disability Law Center