



HAVASUPAI TRIBAL COUNCIL

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January 12, 2017

Statement from Chairman Don E. Watahomigie, Havasupai Indian Tribe

Native American Disability Law Center ("NADLC") files federal civil-rights action against the United States government for failure to provide equal educational opportunities afforded to other students throughout the country

Good morning, my name is Don Watahomigie and I am the Havasupai Tribal Chairman. Last December, the Havasupai tribal council passed a tribal resolution in support of this lawsuit, which was filed today in the District Court here in Arizona.

The Tribal Resolution demonstrates the Tribal Council's support of the Native American Disability Law Center and its partners to investigate and commence litigation surrounding BIE's failure to provide quality education to members of the Havasupai Tribe. In the best interest of our children today and into the future, this is the right thing to do.

Throughout our history, we have fought to provide a quality education to our children. The Havasupai Tribal Council has approached the Bureau of Indian Education many times about its failures to provide adequate staff, a complete curriculum, accommodations to disabled students, involvement of a local school board, and the list goes on and on. And each time we raise these issues we are given promises that are never delivered upon. We appreciate the efforts being made by the Native American Disability Law Center to assist Havasupai students and families in obtaining the education they rightfully deserve.

The Havasupai Tribe is a federally recognized Indian Tribe and we are proud of our long-standing culture and connection to the Grand Canyon. We live in a remote location at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. To access the Village of Supai one must hike or ride a horse 8 miles or arrive by helicopter. There are no automobiles in our village. Our home is a prime example of the outside world's definition of remote, but to us, it is home. Our remoteness should not be used as a tool by BIE to ignore our educational demands or to turn a blind eye to our needs or to justify providing substandard educational services to our people. We stand with the Havasupai families and the Native American Disability Law Center in their fight to receive an equal education and to hold BIE accountable for what they are obligated to provide to our community.

The United States government confined us to this remote location. The United States government promised to provide a quality education to our people. The United States government has failed on this promise and, as a result, our people suffer, our children suffer. Our children are left behind. Our children do not have the opportunity to learn like other children living in the United States. These children are the future of the Havasupai Tribe. These children are our future tribal leaders. And yet, BIE continues to fall short on its promises. The time is now for change.