



Julian Bear Runner

Oglala Sioux Tribe

Office of the President

P.O. Box #2070
Pine Ridge, South Dakota 57770
1(605) 867-5821 Ext. 8420 (O) / 1(605) 867-6076 (F)



A DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY OF SUICIDES ON THE PINE RIDGE RESERVATION

A Declaration by the President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Julian R. Bear Runner:

On this date, August 24, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. (MST), I am declaring a State of Emergency for the Pine Ridge Reservation based on the number of suicides that are on the rise, as well as ideations and attempts.

WHEREAS, the Pine Ridge Reservation covers more than 3 million acres in a remote and rural area, and has more than 45,000 enrolled citizens; and

WHEREAS, the Oglala Sioux Tribe is one of 16 sovereign nations recognized in the Great Plains Region and a part of the *Oceti Sakowin* (Seven Council Fires, also commonly known as the Great Sioux Nation) with Treaty rights that the United States has obligations to us and our unique political relationship with them as set forth in a series of Treaties, including the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 (11 Stat. 749) and the 1868 Sioux Nation Treaty (15 Stat. 635); and

WHEREAS, the United States Treaty obligations and trust responsibility to the Oglala Sioux Tribe call for efforts to ensure peace and prosperity on the Pine Ridge Reservation; and

WHEREAS, despite the United States' Treaty obligations and trust responsibility to our Tribe, our Pine Ridge Reservation suffers exceedingly high rates of suicide, along with other deplorable conditions connected to unemployment and extreme poverty. Within Oglala Lakota County alone, which is entirely within our Reservation, consistently is one of the highest in negative statistics in any county in the United States; and

WHEREAS, many of our Tribal citizens face many socio-economic challenges associated with unresolved generational and historical grief from what our ancestors survived through, compounded with real-time grief over the continual loss of loved ones due to all the leading causes of death on the Reservation, and in particular by suicides; and

WHEREAS, many of our Tribal citizens continue to face historical intergenerational trauma issues and horrific acts committed against them as part of systemic racism that still exists today in America; and

WHEREAS, many of our Tribal citizens continue to reel in the shock waves from the onslaught of Christianity forced on the prior generations to present, which ultimately seek to eradicate our Lakota way of life and beliefs and to replace our teachings and knowledge base with a foreign belief system; and

WHEREAS, many of our Tribal citizens are pushing forward for the restoration of traditional lifeways and laws by understanding and practicing Lakota lifeways and laws in order to combat the extreme poverty, alcohol and drug abuse and addiction, dysfunctional family systems, and high crime rates arising from these negative socio-economic factors affecting our people and contributing to the high suicide rates; and

WHEREAS, adding to the challenges that our people face to restore and maintain our traditional Lakota lifeways, we are now confronted with the COVID-19 Pandemic that threatens our vulnerable population, including our traditional knowledge keepers; and

WHEREAS; we have had to take measures that require isolation and limited movement in our communities in order to prevent further spread of the virus that causes COVID-19 in an effort to protect our people; and

WHEREAS, these necessary measures and the threat of the virus are taking a toll on the mental health needs of our population requiring a response that we are inadequately prepared for due to lack of resources; and

WHEREAS, as of August 17, 2020, the Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Public Safety provided daunting suicide and suicide threats data for each of the 9 political Districts on the Reservation from January 1 – August 17, 2020 alone, and the statistics totals were as follows:

- 177 total Suicide Attempts.
- 5 total Suicides.
- 168 total Suicide Threats; and

WHEREAS, in August 2020 the Oglala Sioux Tribe Suicide Prevention Program has collected suicide related data from all the local agencies and is reporting that there has been 9 suicides in 2020 from January 1 – August 17, 2020 between the ages of 14 and 32, with 4 of those suicides occurring in the last 2 weeks; and

WHEREAS, again in 2019, the Oglala Sioux Tribe Department of Public Safety provided daunting suicide and suicide threats data for the Reservation from January 1, 2017 to July 31, 2019, which included both adults and juveniles, and the statistics at that time were as follows:

- 458 total Suicide Attempts.
- 4 total Suicides.
- 1,126 total Suicide Threats; and

WHEREAS, in 2019, the Indian Health Service, Pine Ridge Service Unit provided daunting suicide related statistics for the nearly 5-year period covering December 2014 to June 2019, and the statistics totals were as follows for Suicide Behaviors:

- 1,325 total Ideation with Plan and Intent.
- 860 total Attempts.
- 43 total Completed.
- 4 total Attempted Suicide with Attempted Homicide; and

WHEREAS, again in 2015, an Oglala Sioux Tribal Presidential Proclamation Declaring a State of Emergency was declared due to the high incidence of suicides among reservation youth. At the time, several declarative actions were to be completed, including:

- The Indian Health Service was to take emergency actions to deal with the youth suicide.
- The U.S. Congress, South Dakota Congressional Delegation, and South Dakota Governor at the time Dennis Daugaard to support a bill in Congress to develop infrastructure on the Reservation that will promote long-term economic self-sufficiency to create permanent jobs which was seen as part of the real cause of abject poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, crime and health care issues like suicide.
- The Tribal Council Committees of Economic & Business Development, Health & Human Services, Education, and Law & Order to work together to develop a Strategic Plan for Oglala Sioux Tribal Council

approval that will promote economic development, job creation, quality health care, counseling services, and improved law and order on the Reservation.

- The Tribal Council Health & Human Services Committee will also develop an ordinance establishing a 'Tribal Youth Services Department' that will develop and operate a wide range of programs aimed at Reservation youth.
- A government-to-government consultation be held between Tribal Council and the Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of Labor, Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Justice for the purpose of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on permanent, annual funding for (at the time) the Tribe's Sweetgrass Program, and improvement of suicide prevention and awareness, and counseling services on the Reservation.
- Restructure the Tribe's Planning Department to increase its efficiency in bringing more public and private sector jobs to the Reservation.
- Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association (GPTCA) to organize an inter-tribal summit on the suicide crisis that exists on the Pine Ridge Reservation and other Reservations to address inter-tribal cooperation in dealing with suicides among our Reservation youth.
- Finally, that it was important to *"work together to reduce the stigma associated with seeking mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention services. At the 2014 White House Tribal Nations Conference held in Washington, DC, U.S. President Barack Obama and his Cabinet addressed the 2014 Native Youth Report, Executive Order establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs, among other upcoming tribal youth initiatives. Tribal Sovereignty and Tribal Self-Determination must be supported by Federal Government and all governmental departments must do a better job of working with the Indigenous Tribal Nations. Concurrence with U.S. President Obama's Executive Order and challenge the White House Council on Native American Affairs to address the specific problems on our American Indian Reservations and work with Tribal Leaders to help our People. We cannot lose any more of our Children!"*; and

WHEREAS, in 2010, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs published a report on S. 1635, acknowledging a federal trust responsibility to provide health care to Native Americans. This trust responsibility to provide health to members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe is expressed in:

- The Treaty of 1868;
- The 1877 Act, Article 8 (each individual will be protected in his/her rights of 'property, person and life');
- The U.S. Supreme Court's interpretation of the 1877 Act, Article 8 in *Ex parte Crow Dog*, 109 U.S. 556, 568-69 (1883)("[t]hey were nevertheless to be subject to the laws of the United States, not in the same sense of citizens, but, as they had always been, as wards subject to a guardian...")
- Protecting each individual Sioux Indian by providing quality health care is a continuing benefit under the 1868 Treaty, 1877 Act, other federal statutes and federal common law; it is not Government largesse, but is part of the quid pro quo for the confiscation of Sioux Treaty lands in violation of the U.S. Constitution;
- The Oglala Sioux Tribe, however, does not acknowledge the confiscation of the Black Hills under the 1877 Act, but merely cites the Act as the 'standard' for compensating it for the denial of the "absolute and undisturbed use and occupation" of the land as guaranteed under the 1868 Treaty; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, the Oglala Sioux Tribe passed Resolution No. 09-269 Declaring a Suicide State of Emergency due to the high incidence of suicides in 2008 and 2009 among our people, citing that suicide was one of the leading causes of death on the reservation. The Resolution also noted:

- That in 1999 the 16th United States Surgeon General (1998-2002) at the time, David Satcher (who also served simultaneously in the position of Assistant Secretary for Health from 1998 through January 2001), declared suicide a serious public health threat and was quoted as putting out a 'call of action', stating *"The nation must address suicide as a significant public health problem and put into place national strategies to prevent the loss of life and the suffering suicide causes. We must act now."*
- By 2012, the 16th United States Surgeon General David Satcher was given credit for issuing the first National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, as noted in the 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action: A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General and of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. This 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention is the latest report nationally to deal with suicide prevention.
- The Oglala Sioux Tribe Sweetgrass Program was established for the following purposes:
 - Increase community awareness, support and coordinate Tribal Youth Suicide Prevention.
 - Strengthen capacity and resources for providing screening, early identification, referral and follow-up of at-risk youth.
 - Reduce the number of Oglala Sioux Tribal youth ages fourteen (14) to twenty-four (24).
 - Contribute to local, regional, and national knowledge and effective strategies for Tribal Youth Suicide Prevention; and

WHEREAS, regardless of these countless efforts by the federal government to fund Tribal programs, all the proclaimed youth initiatives initiated, the numerous declarations, calls for action, the proposed restructuring, the calls for permanent funding for suicide prevention programs and continued strategic plan updates, the increased awareness and education, the reducing of the stigma for seeking help, the retaining data on attempts and completions, the consistent broken promises of the United States' and their meager efforts to do a better job working with indigenous nations on the public health threat of suicides through the years, the urging and calling on the United States to uphold their Treaty obligations and trust responsibilities for us as Oglala Lakota, there continues to be systemic racism in place and a deliberate neglect in place to suppress our people into these horrid conditions, which directly results in the high rates of suicide amongst our youth; and

WHEREAS, suicide, like alcoholism and drug abuse, is a 'symptom of a larger socio-economic problem. However, without the adequate resources that the federal government has at its disposal, the Oglala Sioux Tribe is limited in what efforts it can provide to its citizens in terms of behavioral health professionals, outreach, prevention, awareness, and action, economic development for employment opportunities, a fair share of the economic wealth of the United States of America, and an opportunity to share in the so-called 'American Dream' on the Pine Ridge Reservation due to our race and being a people of color; and

WHEREAS, the people residing on the Pine Ridge Reservation are continuing to learn the warning signs and appropriate responses to suicide, that include, but are not limited to:

- Expressions of no hope for the future.
- Unexpected calls to family members or friends saying good-bye, giving away possessions, preoccupation with death, isolation, and increases consumption of alcohol or drugs.
- Assisting individuals exhibiting these signs by calling 911, or the suicide hotline, or taking the suicidal person to the emergency room at a nearby hospital or health clinic for evaluation and treatment; and

WHEREAS, the Oglala Sioux Tribe will request the United States Congress, pursuant to the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, and Article 8 of the Act of February 28, 1877 (19 Stat. 254), in which the United States agreed that

each individual Sioux Indian on the reservation would be protected in his/her "rights of property and life" – to provide through the Indian Health Service and/or the Bureau of Indian Affairs and/or other concerned federal agencies:

- a. Provide emergency federal funds to assist in the revision of the Tribal Suicide Prevention Plan.
- b. Provide emergency federal funds to deal with the immediate suicide crisis confronting our Tribal citizens.
- c. Provide long-term, permanent yearly funding for the Tribe's Suicide Prevention Program; and

WHEREAS, the Oglala Sioux Tribe Executive Committee met on August 18, 2020 to discuss the matter of this Declaration and approved of its release.

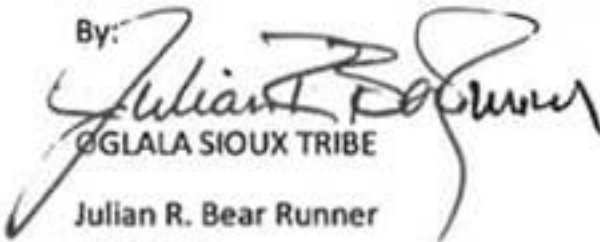
NOW, THEREFORE, I, JULIAN R. BEAR RUNNER, PRESIDENT OF THE OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE DO HEREBY DECLARE A STATE OF EMERGENCY OF SUICIDES ON THE PINE RIDGE RESERVATION; AND

BE IT FURTHER DECLARED, I, JULIAN R. BEAR RUNNER, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, calls on all components of the United States government to assist us in our efforts to prevent suicide on our Pine Ridge Reservation, and to do so by providing sustainable, consistent and perpetual funding for these purposes. Also reminds the United States of America of its treaty obligations and trust responsibilities to the Oglala Sioux Tribe (as part of the Great Sioux Nation) and requests immediate technical assistance from the Department of Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Department of Health & Human Services in the form of immediate deployment of appropriate Behavioral Health Professionals and other related professionals to the Pine Ridge Reservation to assist the Tribe with suicide prevention and intervention efforts, as well as to fund existing programs on the Reservation that can help thwart suicide; and

BE IT FURTHER DECLARED, I, JULIAN R. BEAR RUNNER, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, demand that the previously established Tribal-Suicide Task Force be reenacted immediately to develop and implement strategies for combatting the high rates of suicide on our Pine Ridge Reservation and provide a thorough report within 30 days in order to present to the United States Congress for immediate action, to create a Bill that will provide for long-term solutions to turning the socio-economic conditions around here on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The Tribal-Suicide Task Force will ensure that there are adequate behavioral health resources that are coordinated with federal agencies listed above; and

BE IT FINALLY DECLARED, I, JULIAN R. BEAR RUNNER, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, call on our Lakota Oyate to help one another. In order to heal the youth, our Lakota Oyate needs to help our Lakota youth to call back their spirits to they can be healed by ensuring that the traditional practices and protocols are in place for traditional healing and related services. One such service is to support the ability for youth to receive their spiritual Lakota name, in order to help them learn the value and gift of life regardless of despair we all experience in our lives, as well as to be taught all of the Lakota teachings and values. By calling on our ancestors for help in the Lakota way of life, we all will provide for a mechanism for the healing of the youth, and their parents and grandparents. Our Lakota way of life is here for the betterment of the Lakota Oyate in general.

By:


OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE
Julian R. Bear Runner
President

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my
hand and cause to be affixed the Great Seal of the
Oglala Sioux Tribe on this 24th day of August, 2020.

