

Honorable Members of the Subcommittee,

Before we begin, please allow me to introduce myself in the traditional and respectable manner of my native tongue. Haganee'uh, ne Marco Ovando naneeha. Ne bi Marcella McKinney ne Appe Francisco Ovando. Ne Tosawih Tso'a'vich Newe a Koa'aga'itoka Numa. Ne bit Dokapattih ne Idaho a Nevada.

For translation to my relations, I am greeting each of you in high regard by stating who I am as a Shoshone Paiute youth by first stating my parents, secondly my traditional nomadic bands of the White Knife, Jarbidge, and Salmon-Eater Peoples, and lastly where I call home, Duck Valley. As nomadic nations, understanding where one roamed was essential to identity. This introduction also ties me and all of my spiritual being into the resilient culture of the Great Basin. It reminds me every time I speak it, that I am strong, resilient, and most importantly, Indigenous.

I am honored to speak before you today to share my testimony on how being reconnected to the traditional cultures that all native youth possess within us; our minds and spirituality can heal, flourish, and thrive. Though it may not look like it from a camera screen or at first glimpse, I in fact struggle from depression and social anxiety. They come and go but just a few years ago I was in a very dark place from these demons. So lost and dark in fact I even contemplated suicide. I didn't know where to go. My mother was long deceased and my father estranged. Western medicine wasn't adequate in my rural desert community. But it was in that dark moment of my life, a light glimmered. That light was my culture embodied by my grandmother, who in the decades of her incredible life, has reconnected with her spirituality and has then helped countless people on the reservation reconnect with theirs. How you may ask? Well It started with a simple road trip to the camas prairie on the north end of my reservation to harvest the staple root of my people. A root that helped sustain us through the bitter winters on the plateau. I was taught how we consumed the roots of the plants placed in the earth in relation to tying us closer to the planet. I was also taught various phrases and words of objects in Shoshone and Paiute, and of course engaged in many long days of talking with elders about the past and the stories passed down from generations in the oral tradition, gaining the sacred knowledge so many are worried to lose.

In those months and then years of spending time among my culture, my depression gradually diminished and my social anxiety was replaced with an immense passion for working with youth. I was more than eager to start. That was when organizations like UNITY seemingly fell into place perfectly to help me do just that, much like today in this very hearing. My mental health was tied to my spirituality and to me and my people back home, one can't exist without the other. Much like in my introduction, I would probably still be lost and without knowing who I am if I didn't rediscover it.

My story is a story repeated across Indian Country, where youth who are lost and alone like I was, are reconnected to who they were before colonization and in return, are mentally revitalized to face the ever changing world of the 21st Century and begin the process to reverse centuries of institutionalized genocide and intergenerational trauma for generations to come to flourish. However, my story is my story of its own, unique and just as important as the countless others. I hope these words inspired each of you to further understand yourself and make the best decisions in this subcommittee to help my success story become the success story of thousands

of fellow Americans. By advocating for those whose voice has yet to be discovered, I hope that by supporting tribal sovereignty and the mental and spiritual health of the First Americans will ever be at the forefront of this Congress. Thank you for your time and I will happily take any questions you may have.