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***Governor's order expresses support for federal investigations into Indian boarding schools***

ONEIDA — Gov. Tony Evers on Indigenous Peoples Day today signed Executive Order #136 issuing a formal acknowledgement and apology for Wisconsin's historical role in Indian boarding schools. The governor's order also includes a formal declaration of support for the U.S. Department of Interior investigation announced earlier this year and requesting any investigations in Wisconsin be undertaken in consultation with Wisconsin's Native Nations.

For more than a century between the 1860s and 1970s, the U.S. federal government induced and coerced thousands of Native American children from their families and homes, placing them into boarding schools funded by the U.S. government operated by the government and religious organizations. Estimates indicate thousands of children were forced to attend day and boarding schools across the country. Residential schools sought to force assimilation of Native American children by isolating them from their cultural identities, punishing them for speaking their native language or practicing their traditions, prohibiting them from wearing traditional clothing, and requiring children to cut their hair. Investigators condemned conditions in the boarding schools in 1928 as "grossly inadequate," and, in 1969, as "sterile, impersonal and rigid, with a major focus on discipline and punishment."

Available records indicate there were at least 10 day and boarding schools operated in Wisconsin where thousands of Native children attended, while hundreds of children from Wisconsin were sent to attend out-of-state boarding schools in places like Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Virginia.

Lack of available and reliable documentation presents challenges for understanding the full scope and effects of boarding schools in Wisconsin and across the U.S. Nevertheless, the residential schools have had intergenerational effects on Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, including emotional trauma and culture and language loss, among many other long-lasting, negative consequences.

"As a state, we share responsibility for acknowledging the pain inflicted on Tribal communities historically and even still today. We also have a moral obligation to pursue the truth and to bring these injustices to light in Wisconsin and across our country because that understanding and acknowledgment is essential for accountability and healing," said Gov. Evers. "We recognize the trauma inflicted on Native families and communities and the loss of language, culture, and identity and the intergenerational effects these facilities had and still have while honoring the resilience and contributions of Indigenous people to our state and our country."

Gov. Evers' announcement today comes as earlier this year as the remains of more than 1,300 students were discovered in Canada at residential school sites. Following the initial discovery, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland and member of the Pueblo of Laguna announced a Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative to comprehensively review historical records and legacy of U.S. boarding school policies.

Today marks the third time Wisconsin has celebrated Indigenous Peoples Day, first recognized in 2019 when Gov. Evers signed Executive Order #50 to recognize the day annually on the second Monday in October. A proclamation for Indigenous Peoples Day is available here.

Wisconsin is home to eleven federally-recognized Native Nations and one federally unrecognized nation, including Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Sokaogon Chippewa Community Mole Lake Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, St Croix Chippewa Tribe of Wisconsin, Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Tribe, and Brothertown Indian Nation.