

For Immediate Release

UTE INDIAN TRIBE ADVANCES INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT TO PROTECT UTE INDIAN CHILDREN AND PRESERVE UTE INDIAN FAMILIES

Ft. Duchesne, UT; April 28, 2021

On April 22, 2021, the Ute Indian Tribe Business Committee (“Business Committee”) formally approved an Intergovernmental Agreement (“IGA”) with the State of Utah to memorialize the mutual commitment of the Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation (“Ute Indian Tribe”) and the State of Utah, by and through their respective governmental agencies of Ute Family Services and Utah’s Licensing, Division of Child and Family Services (“DCFS”), to work together to establish joint policies and procedures pursuant to the Indian Child Welfare Act (“ICWA”) to protect Ute Indian children. The purpose of the IGA is to preserve and strengthen Ute Indian families, ensure permanency for Ute Indian children, protect the continuing existence of the Ute Indian culture, protect and further the best interests of Ute Indian children and their families, protect the general welfare including health, care, safety, and supervision of Ute Indian children and respect and honor the Ute Indian Tribe’s sovereign authority over child custody proceedings involving Ute Indian children.

The IGA will go before the Governor of the State of Utah for final approval and signature. Once signed, the IGA will govern all jurisdictional transfers of child welfare cases concerning Ute Indian children that may come under state court jurisdiction to ensure that they are properly adjudicated in the Ute Tribal Court – Juvenile Division pursuant to Ute tribal laws. The IGA also restricts access to the Reservation by state DCFS workers in family services matters.

The prior IGA expired on December 8, 2013. The Tribal Business Committee, with input and support from Ute Family Services and the Ute Tribal Court – Juvenile Division Judge negotiated and developed the terms of the IGA to ensure that the interests of Ute children and tribal member families are protected.

Business Committee Chairman Luke Duncan stated that “the purpose of ICWA is to keep Indian children with Indian families, this IGA will ensure the Ute Indian Tribe’s children are protected so as to preserve Ute Indian families.” Moving forward, Chairman Duncan stated that “no Ute Indian child should ever be placed in a non-Indian home unless each and every option to place such children with tribal member family or tribal member foster care homes have been fully exhausted” as further required under the IGA and Ute tribal law pursuant to Business Committee Resolution No. 21-081, which requires kinship placement for foster care placement or adoption of Ute Indian children.

About the Ute Indian Tribe-The Ute Indian Tribe resides on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation in northeastern Utah. Three bands of Utes comprise the Ute Indian Tribe: the Whiteriver Band, the Uncompahgre Band and the Uintah Band. The Tribe has a membership of more than three thousand individuals, with over half living on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation. The Ute Indian Tribe operates its own tribal government and oversees approximately 1.3 million acres of trust land, which contains significant oil and gas deposits. The Tribal Business Committee is the governing council of the Tribe.