



## GREAT LAKES INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL, INC.

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### Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc.

#### Board of Directors

#### Resolution No. 2025-03.03

### Opposing the Closure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Offices in Ashland and Shawano, Wisconsin, and Bemidji, Minnesota

**Whereas** the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. (GLITC) is a consortium of twelve federally recognized Native American tribes located in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan; and

**Whereas** the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Board of Directors consists of the highest elected officials of the member tribes; and

**Whereas** since 1965, GLITC has been successfully providing a wide variety of programs and services in the areas of Aging and Disabilities; Economic Development; Education, Health, and Research; Elder Programs; Epidemiology; Family Nutrition and Maternal Child Health; and Vocational Rehabilitation to meet the needs of all Native Americans from birth through life; and

**Whereas** our member tribes are federally recognized sovereign tribal nations, have inherent rights to self-governance and self-determination as affirmed by treaties, the U.S. Constitution, and federal law; and

**Whereas** the United States government, along with and through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), holds a trust responsibility to provide services, protect tribal assets, and support the welfare of Native American tribes and individuals, obligations rooted in treaties and historical agreements; and

**Whereas** the United States government has legal obligations to protect and uphold the rights of tribal nations, and the closure of these offices could undermine these responsibilities; and

**Whereas** the BIA office in Ashland, Wisconsin, serves as a critical regional hub for the six bands of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk, Oneida and Stockbridge-Munsee located in Wisconsin, and the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Chippewa located in Michigan, providing essential services including land trust applications, real estate management, mortgage reporting, conversion of individually owned properties into trust lands, education assistance, and law enforcement support; and

***Whereas*** a smaller BIA Forestry office in Shawano, Wisconsin, and the IHS office in Bemidji, Minnesota have also been identified for cancellation of their leases; and

***Whereas*** the loss of federal offices can lead to job losses and economic instability in tribal areas as many tribal members are employed by these offices, and their closure can have a ripple effect on local economies; and

***Whereas*** closing the Ashland BIA office, could have a profound impact on the tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized tribes it serves in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan because tribal sovereignty – the inherent authority of tribes to govern themselves, manage their lands, and maintain their cultural identity – relies heavily on the practical support and legal framework provided by the BIA; and

***Whereas*** the closure of the Ashland BIA office threatens tribal self-determination, a legal principal codified in the 1975 Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, which empowers tribes to manage their own programs with BIA support; and

***Whereas*** the Ashland BIA office manages an annual lease, contributing to the economic stability of the region while ensuring accessible, localized support for tribal nations and members across northern Wisconsin and northern Michigan; and

***Whereas*** the Ashland BIA office employs 40 staff members who tailor services to local needs like education grants, economic development, and probate for trust lands, and centralizing these to a regional hub unfamiliar with our member tribes' specific histories and challenges could erode this tailored support; and

***Whereas*** if our member tribes can't efficiently access BIA resources, such as those the Ashland BIA office provides, their ability to govern independently weakens, pushing them toward reliance on state or private entities with less knowledge of treaty and trust responsibilities; and

***Whereas*** the planned closure of the Ashland BIA office, scheduled for August 2025, will eliminate a vital point of contact between tribal nations and the federal government, forcing tribal members to travel significant distances to access services, thereby imposing undue financial and logistical burdens, particularly on elders, low-income individuals, and those in rural areas; and

***Whereas*** the closure threatens to delay critical processes such as fee-to-trust land applications, which are essential for exercising tribal sovereignty, protecting tribal lands from local jurisdiction and taxation, and advancing economic development, housing, and cultural preservation initiatives; and

***Whereas*** the removal of the Ashland BIA office undermines the federal government's trust responsibility, erodes decades of progress toward tribal self-governance, and signals a retreat from commitments to support Native American communities in the Midwest Region; and

***Whereas*** the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council and our member tribes have a vested interest in maintaining a strong, accessible partnership with the BIA to uphold treaty rights, protect trust assets, and ensure the well-being of our people.

***Now therefore, be it resolved*** that the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. Board of Directors hereby opposes the closure of the Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Ashland, Wisconsin, the BIA Forestry office in Shawano, Wisconsin, and the IHS office in Bemidji, Minnesota, and calls upon the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and elected representatives to reconsider this decision in light of its detrimental impacts on tribal nations and members; and

***Be it further resolved*** that the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. Board of Directors hereby demands that the federal government honor its trust obligations by maintaining an operational BIA presence in Ashland or establishing an alternative, accessible facility nearby to serve the needs of northern Wisconsin tribes; and

***Be it further resolved*** that the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council Board of Directors urges immediate consultation with affected tribal nations, as required by federal law and policy, to address the consequences of this closure and develop solutions that preserve equitable access to BIA services; and

***Be it further resolved*** that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Secretary of the Interior, the Midwest Regional Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Senators from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota, the U.S. Representative for Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District, the U.S. Representative for Michigan's 1st Congressional District, the U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 8th Congressional District, and other relevant officials, with a request for a written response within 30 days outlining actions to address these concerns.

## CERTIFICATION

I, the undersigned President of the Board of Directors of the Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc., do hereby certify that this resolution was adopted by the Board of Directors, on the 12th day of March, 2025.

Digitally signed by:

Shannon Holsey

Shannon Holsey, President