Support a National Call to Action for Truth and Reconciliation on the impacts of Indian Boarding Schools by wearing an orange shirt on Sept. 30

(Salem) – Orange Shirt Day on Sept. 30, 2022 is a day for truth and reconciliation on the impacts of the Indian Boarding School system. It opens the door for a global conversation about all aspects of the Indian boarding school system and how it forced Indigenous populations to lose their cultural identities. It is an opportunity to create meaningful discussion about the effects of these schools and the legacy they have left behind.

Staff at the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) will be wearing orange to honor the survivors and victims of the federal Indian Boarding School System. ODHS’ commitment to dismantling all forms of systemic racism is led by reconciliation and collaboration with all Tribal communities within Oregon and is strengthened by our Equity North Star, which is our agency wide vision that leads to a more equitable Oregon for all.

“Orange Shirt Day represents an Indigenous movement throughout the United States and Canada,” said Adam Becenti, ODHS Office of Tribal Affairs Director. “Orange Shirt Day is a call to action, but more importantly is an opportunity to honor the lives that were lost and those who survived this atrocity.”

“We will be wearing orange to honor the survivors and victims of the Indian Boarding School system and to recognize the trauma it caused for generations of Tribal families and children,” said Rebecca Jones Gaston, ODHS Child Welfare Director. “In Oregon our Child Welfare Division’s Vision for Transformation commits us to dismantling the structures, underlying mindsets, and biases that contribute to racialized and disparate outcomes for Tribal children and families. We honor the sovereignty and self-determination of the Nine Tribes of Oregon and are committed
to reconciliation, healing and government-to-government collaboration when working with Oregon Tribes to support the needs of Tribal children and their families.”

According to the U.S. Department of the Interior’s 2022 investigation report, between 1819 and 1969, the federal Indian boarding school system operated more than 400 schools across 37 states or then-territories. During this time thousands of Indigenous children were separated from their families and placed in the school system, many did not survive. The investigation identified marked and unmarked burial sites at approximately 53 different schools across the school system.

The federal Indian boarding school system deployed systematic militarized and identity-alteration methodologies in an attempt to assimilate American Indian and Alaska Native children through education, including but not limited to renaming Tribal children English names; cutting the hair of Tribal children; discouraging or preventing the use of Tribal languages, religions and cultural practices; and organizing children into units to perform military drills.

As early as 1874, a boarding school was built at Warm Springs in Oregon, and others were later constructed at Siletz, Grand Ronde, Klamath, and Umatilla. Today, Chemawa Indian School, located in Salem, Oregon is an accredited high school that serves American Indian and Alaska Native students. Chemawa is the oldest continuously operated off-reservation boarding school in the United States.

About the ODHS Office Tribal Affairs

The Office of Tribal Affairs within the ODHS Director’s Office is a team committed to all Oregon Tribal communities thriving mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Tribal Affairs works with all five ODHS programs to create and provide Tribally appropriate programming, services, policies and support. Through Tribal consultation with Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon, ODHS ensures programming, services, and policies meet the needs of Oregon Tribal communities.

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