

Testimony of Rachael Lorenzo
Before the United States House Committee on Ways & Means
“Field Hearing on Empowering Native American and Rural Communities”
May 10, 2024

[Greeting in Keres] Gu’waa’tzee/hello.

Thank you for the invitation to speak before the House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee. My name is Rachael Lorenzo, and I am from the Mescalero Apache Tribe and the Pueblo of Laguna, in New Mexico. Many thanks to the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community for hosting this hearing on your lands today.

I am the founder and executive director of Indigenous Women Rising, a Native American- led and -centered reproductive justice organization based in New Mexico that serves the entire United States, its territories, Indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central America, and Canada. We fund midwifery care, abortion care, menstrual hygiene, and anything our Native relatives need in the realm of sexual and reproductive health.

At IWR, we believe all people should be able to make decisions about their bodies, including whether or not to have children and freedom to live in safe, sustainable communities. Our communities are entitled to continuing our cultural beliefs and our languages, managing our tribal lands, clean water, stable housing, paved roads, accessible childcare, well paying jobs on and off the reservation, quality education, state of the art healthcare that is culturally sensitive, consistent internet access, affordable fresh food, safe communities free from violence and addiction, and agricultural sovereignty.

While the work we do may not be agreeable with everyone in our own communities, we remain respectful of tribal sovereignty and the role our elders and tribal leaders play in our daily lives, and we always pray for them- that they are guided by the needs of their people and the longevity of their cultures and languages.

Indigenous Women Rising does the work that Native folks across the country ask of us- funding and support. While our work may be considered controversial, the people who come to us, who come from a variety of Christian faiths and traditional beliefs– we all have one thing in common: we need an auntie or cousin figure to help us talk through some of these taboo topics and know what our options are. Not only do we have an abortion fund, but we have an Emergence Fund, which funds pregnant people who decide to carry their pregnancies to term to hire the doula or midwife of their choice without worrying about cost. The name of this fund comes from the Pueblo creation stories as the people’s emergence into this world.

I want to ensure that I am very clear- abortion has been here since time immemorial. Whether bands or groups of Native people faced war, famine, or migration, sex has never been an afterthought and our ancestors knew the remedies to start our periods again like the plants to

use and how to use them. Many of these plants also assisted with birthing the placenta, and other plants used for breastmilk production or easing postpartum bleeding. These stories have been passed down in Native and Indigenous communities all over the world, and my community included.

I want to emphasize that about one quarter of our callers come from Arizona, whether they are seeking abortion care in AZ or elsewhere. Our abortion fund started in 2018 because of Indigenous folks right here in the Grand Canyon State saw us in the media for a breastfeeding project in 2017 and asked if we would also help them seek abortion care. We also assist our relatives with traditional needs, like compensating a medicine man or woman in their own tribe to help with a healing ceremony or funeral home expenses for burials.

As Native peoples, we have a communal obligation to support each other and that obligation is as old as my people. For me, this communal obligation is not to just Native people but all people. This means Indigenous Women Rising's work ensures that we can care for our reproductive and sexual health, just as easily as it is to see the sky outside.

Da wa eh. Thank you.