EXHIBIT 3
DATE 2/13/2013
HB 286

Fort Belknap Indian Community

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Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Tribal Govt.)
Fort Belknap Indian Community
(Elected to administer the affairs of the community and to represent the Assiniboine and the Gros Ventre Tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation)

TESTIMONY OF THE FORT BELKNAP INDIAN COMMUNITY

HB - 286: 'An Act expanding the eligibility for tuition and fee waivers to include residents of Montana who are enrolled members of a state recognized or federally recognized tribe,' amending section 20-25-421, MCA; and providing an effective date.

Testimony to the Legislative Committee

Good afternoon. My name is Loren 'Bum' Stiffarm and I serve as the Chief Administrative Officer for the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. In my position I have oversight of all the Tribal Programs at Fort Belknap among these are the Higher Education Program (scholarships), Head Start, Child Care, Upward Bound, and Talent Search.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community Council strongly supports House Bill No. 286 by taking out the language in the current bill which state ***'persons of one fourth Indian blood or more'*** are eligible to participate in this program.

Fort Belknap is one of seven Indian Reservations in the State of Montana and each of the tribal governments have their own Enrollment Offices which has specific enrollment criteria for membership into their respective tribes.

At Fort Belknap we are very unique in that we have two separate tribal nations that reside here. We have the Assiniboine or Nakoda and the Gros Ventre or Aaniiih Nakoda nations that live here.

However, the enrollment criteria for membership enrollment at Fort Belknap used to be that you could be enrolled into Fort Belknap if you were of certain degrees of Indian blood. These were:

- 1/4 degree of Gros Ventre blood
- 1/4 degree of Assiniboine blood
- 1/4 combination of both Gros Ventre or Assiniboine blood

In 2001, the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council changed the Eligibility for Enrollment to:

- Each person of one eighth (1/8) or more Indian blood, as defined in the Fort Belknap Indian Community's Constitution as stated in language previously mentioned.

So, in essence the Council changed our enrollment criteria from 1/4 to 1/8 blood quantum. But as the current language in state statute now is such that some of our 200 college students would ***not*** be able to qualify for the State Fee Waiver simply because of our blood quantum

I am a prime example of how college students would be adversely affected if the language is not changed.

- I am 7/8 degree Indian blood. My mother is a full blooded Cree enrolled at Rocky Boy. My father was 3/4 Gros Ventre enrolled at Fort Belknap.
- So, I am ½ Cree blood as well as 3/8 Gros Ventre blood and enrolled at Fort Belknap.

But what is even more confusing is that my children are:

- 1/4 degree of Cree blood but are ***not*** enrolled at Rocky Boy.
- 1/8 degree of Gros Ventre blood but ***are*** enrolled in Fort Belknap.

If you were to pass HB 286, my children would have been eligible to participate in the program while they were in college . But again it is a need based program and they would not have qualified anyway due to other circumstances. So what this tells you, is just because you are changing the language in the bill, ***not all Indian students will be eligible for the State Fee Waiver as it is a need based program.***

I would again like to voice the Fort Belknap Indian Community's strong support for HB 286. I thank you very much for the opportunity to testify on this bill.