



12-17-1954

Letter from John B. Hart to Senator Langer Regarding Illegitimacy Cases on the Fort Berthold Reservation, December 17, 1954

John B. Hart
North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission

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Recommended Citation

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North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission

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John B. Hart, Executive Director
ROLLA, NORTH DAKOTA

December 17, 1954

Honorable William Langer
Senator from the State of North Dakota
Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Langer:

I am returning herewith the letter of Pansy Pawson, Social Worker of the Fort Berthold Indian Agency, sent to you under date of November 17, 1954. My comments on this letter areas as follows.

The original information I received regarding the twenty illegitimacy cases was secured at a meeting of the Fort Berthold Inter-Agency Committee at Elbowoods, North Dakota in 1953. At that time Dr. Wilson, Medical Officer of the Fort Berthold Indian Agency, commented that there were in excess of twenty illegitimate children on that reservation for the two years prior to June 30, 1953. He further commented that six fathers were known but they would not assume any responsibility. He also stated that there were several cases of neglect of children on that reservation. For about a year, I have constantly, at meetings of the Fort Berthold Inter-Agency Committee, requested the Superintendent to give our committee information as to what was being done to establish parentage for the twenty children mentioned by Dr. Wilson. His answer has uniformly been he has not had time to check into the matter and consequently he is unable to answer the question. It would seem to me that this statement of Dr. Wilson's relative to the twenty illegitimate children born during the two years prior to June 30th, 1953 would be correct. It may be a little too low as the information from the State Health Department from the birth records which were submitted to your committee on Table 10 and 11 shows there were twenty-one illegitimate Indian children born on or adjacent to the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation during the year 1953.

If Miss Pawson, the author of the letter to you under date of November 17th, was interested in finding out about these cases and knowing the names of the cases, I am sure that Dr. Wilson, the Medical Officer of the reservation, would be able to make this information available to her. I have not requested the names and do not intend to request the names. If I am going to do the Social Worker's work at the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, I intend to be paid for it. I'm not paid for that and consequently I'm not going to do it.

Honorable William Langer

-2-

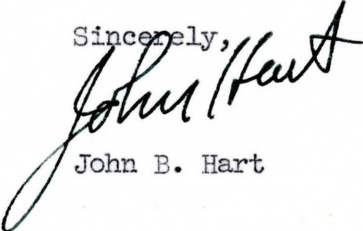
December 17, 1954

I wish to agree with the statement in her letter in which she says "No mass effort is made to prove paternity on each and every case of illegitimacy reported on the birth certificate at the Fort Berthold Agency." What I am interested in knowing is if any effort is being made. If any effort is being made, that is helpful, but it seems to me there should be a complete effort made because these Indian children have inherent rights to have a father and they have inherent rights of inheritance. There should be no exception.

The author of the letter also mentioned that quite often a married man is the father of the child and it would be useless to force marriage. That, of course, is correct. The fact that a married man is the father of an illegitimate child should not deprive that child of a father's responsibility of the right of the child to inherit from his father.

Senator, I take quite seriously this idea that the Indian Service should "get on the ball" and give these innocent illegitimate children conscientious, elbow-grease help. I know your viewpoint on this so there is no need in discussing the matter further.

Sincerely,



John B. Hart

JBH:mh
Enclosure