

TESTIMONY OF J. CONRAD SENECA
PRESIDENT OF THE SENECA NATION OF INDIANS
ON
H.R. 7065, THE SENECA NATION LAW ENFORCEMENT EFFICIENCY ACT
BEFORE
THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
MARCH 4, 2026

Good morning Chairman Hurd, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is JC Seneca and I serve as the President of Seneca Nation of Indians. I am a Wolf clan member of our Nation from the Cattaraugus Territory and a veteran of the United States Air Force. I am pleased today to present testimony before the Subcommittee on H.R. 7065, the Seneca Nation Law Enforcement Efficiency Act.

The Seneca Nation is a historic member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy which entered into a treaty relationship with the United States in 1794. Under our treaty, our two peoples agreed to live in peace under your promise that you would respect the “free use and enjoyment” of our lands located in Western New York State. I am here today to ask that you remedy a violation of that treaty commitment that occurred in 1948 when Congress gave the State of New York criminal jurisdiction over our people and our lands. I make this request at a time when our Nation is facing a grave threat from drugs and drug trafficking that is affecting the lives of our 8,600 people.

While the drug problem we now face has been decades in the making, it was amplified by Congressional interference that undermined our sovereign jurisdiction in a 1948 law codified at 25 USC section 232. Following World War II, the U.S. launched its 'Indian Termination Policy,' aiming to eliminate Native nations and their sovereign status through forced assimilation. Congress systematically stripped our jurisdiction, starting with grants to states like Iowa and

Kansas in 1940. This culminated in Public Law 280 in 1953, unilaterally imposing state jurisdiction and profoundly eroding self-governance, which allowed many states to have the power to prosecute and incarcerate Indians for crimes occurring on their own land.

Despite opposition from the Seneca Nation, Congress unilaterally enacted Section 232, effectively furthering its Indian Termination agenda. -The Termination Policy eventually proved to be a failure and was repudiated once and for all by President Nixon in 1970.

Congress has since embraced a policy of supporting Indian self-determination, a shift that has ignited positive change and greatly benefited the Seneca people. . For example, Congress amended Public Law 280 to ensure that states could not assume criminal jurisdiction over Native people and lands without their consent. It also allowed a procedure, called “retrocession,” to allow states to “give back” criminal jurisdiction to the federal and tribal governments.

Unfortunately, Congress has yet to establish a legal remedy for the Seneca Nation to reaffirm the inherent sovereignty that was revoked with the passage of Section 232. H.R. 7065, introduced by our representatives Mr. Langworthy and Mr. Kennedy, would honor our treaty relationship by establishing a path to nullifying the State’s ability to prosecute and incarcerate the Seneca people for crimes occurring in our territories.

As I mentioned earlier, this request comes at a time of acute threat to the Seneca people arising from the trafficking of hard drugs such as heroin and fentanyl in our territories and our region of Western New York. Over the last few years, the problem has significantly worsened, with a growing number of our people struggling with addiction, resulting in numerous drug overdoses and deaths. We have seen this crisis expand into sex trafficking of Seneca women and escalated community violence, including murder.

Since I took office in November 2024, my administration has reached out to all levels of outside law enforcement for assistance, including high ranking officials of the U.S. Departments of Interior and Justice, as well as the New York State police, the county sheriffs, and the local police departments. In July of last year, we hosted a Law Enforcement Summit and brought together all agencies to develop action strategies to combat the drug trafficking epidemic. Our investigations revealed grim realities: Jamestown, a small city, shockingly serves as the state's second most active drug trafficking municipality, next to the Bronx. Organized criminal elements are preying on Seneca women and vulnerable youth. This indiscriminate drug crisis affects both Native and non-Native communities and has no simple solution. Discussions have revealed that the drug problem is compounded by Section 232 because it has altered the Nation's jurisdiction and the federal government's jurisdiction to address criminal activity in our territories. For 77 years, the federal government has largely ignored its responsibility to protect the Seneca people from criminal activity and consistently deferred criminal law enforcement to State jurisdiction. But that is just plain wrong. The United States made the treaty and trust responsibility to our people, not the State.

We have also learned that Section 232 has effectively stunted the development of our Nation's own law enforcement capabilities. Our Nation marshals do not exercise criminal law enforcement powers and instead forced to depend upon the State police and local sheriffs to address violent criminal offenders. We have also learned that the State's response to criminal activity in our territories is inconsistent at best and neglectful at worst.

Enacting H.R. 7065 will not magically resolve the threat to our People and our Nation. However, it will restore our fundamental right to self-determination, solidifying a true partnership with the federal government. The bill mandates mutual consent to nullify Section

232, thus a compact must first be reached between the United States and the Seneca Nation, ensuring continuous criminal oversight.

While we recognize the U.S. Supreme Court's position affirming the State's role in addressing non-Indian criminal activity on our lands, we are fully prepared to navigate this reality. Our recent collaboration with Governor Hochul and the State Legislature has already laid the groundwork for future law enforcement cooperation.

In closing, I ask – on behalf of the Seneca Nation and the Seneca people – that the Congress enact H.R. 7065 to nullify the grant of criminal jurisdiction to New York State under Section 232 and restore respect for the inherent sovereignty of the Seneca Nation and our treaty relationship with the United States.