

No. 21-734

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

STATE OF OKLAHOMA,
Petitioner,

v.

JUSTIN DALE LITTLE,
Respondent.

**On Petition for a Writ of Certiorari to the
Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals**

**BRIEF FOR AMICUS CURIAE
MUSCOGEE (CREEK) NATION IN SUPPORT
OF RESPONDENT**

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INTEREST OF AMICUS CURIAE

Though the ink is barely dry in *McGirt v. Oklahoma*, 140 S. Ct. 2452 (2020), the Muscogee (Creek) Nation (the “Nation”) again finds its Reservation under assault.¹ Oklahoma has filed over forty petitions to overrule *McGirt*. These petitions ignore the substantial, ongoing efforts by the federal government and the Nation to ensure the orderly administration of criminal justice on the Reservation, and conjure a portrait of civil upheaval that does not exist. In both *McGirt* and *Sharp v. Murphy*, 140 S. Ct. 2412 (2020), this Court recognized the Nation’s critical interests in defending its Reservation and presenting an accurate portrayal of the discharge of governmental responsibilities thereon. The Nation returns to the Court in the face of Oklahoma’s renewed attacks on its Reservation and governance.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Oklahoma advances the boldest of claims with the weakest of support. It urges the Court to overrule itself just one Term removed from rendering a seminal decision that thoroughly considered the status of the Creek Reservation. The claim is all the brasher because the full Court agreed in *McGirt* that it was

¹ No counsel for any party authored this brief in whole or in part. No one other than amicus curiae made a monetary contribution to its preparation or submission. The parties were timely notified and have consented to its filing.

construing congressional intent on an issue where Congress enjoys plenary power, leaving no obstacle to congressional consideration of the decision and its consequences. Oklahoma's project shows little regard for the separation of powers, and even less for the integrity of the judicial process.

Oklahoma's justifications sound in fiction rather than fact. The United States, the Nation, and local officials are successfully collaborating to ensure that there is no crisis of criminal justice on the Reservation. Oklahoma cannot conjure one by disregarding their efforts. The Oklahoma Court of Criminal Appeals ("OCCA") has narrowed the universe of cognizable *McGirt*-based conviction challenges to those raised on direct appeal. The United States and the Nation are reprosecuting where such challenges succeed and are devoting substantial resources to the investigation and prosecution of new crimes.

Nor has civil society been upended. Oklahoma ignores notable successes, including the execution of a Tribal-State child custody compact that preserves existing placements and maintains cooperative jurisdiction going forward. It instead highlights dubious lawsuits and nervous hand-wringing that hardly connote chaos.

Congress, meanwhile, is taking appropriate action to protect public safety. That Congress has not deemed it advisable to disestablish the Creek Reservation does not suggest that this Court should take up the task. A proper respect for Congress's primary role in Indian affairs counsels just the opposite.

REASONS FOR DENYING THE PETITION

I. Oklahoma Confuses the Court for a Political Branch of Government.

Just over a Term ago, this Court affirmed the continued existence of the Nation's Reservation. *McGirt* was unquestionably a carefully rendered decision. Both the majority opinion and the Chief Justice's dissent extensively explore the Nation's history and Congress's treatment of its Reservation. Oklahoma has no plausible claim that the issues were not fully joined, and indeed limits its argument that *McGirt* is incorrect on the law to just two paragraphs of its petitions.

Yet Oklahoma promptly flooded the Court with requests that *McGirt* be overruled. Two related factors underscore the drastic nature of the State's project. First, *McGirt* affirms that decisions to disestablish reservations "belong[] to Congress alone," and in particular that "courts have no proper role in the adjustment of reservation borders." 140 S. Ct. at 2462. On this the majority and dissenting opinions fully agree, *id.* at 2489 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting) ("No one argues that courts can 'adjust[]' reservation borders."), and Congress's intent with respect to the Creek Reservation is undeniably their touchstone, *id.* at 2462–63; *id.* at 2482, 2485 (Roberts, C.J., dissenting).

Second, "*stare decisis* has 'special force' 'in respect to statutory interpretation' because 'Congress

remains free to alter what [this Court has] done.” *Halliburton Co. v. Erica P. John Fund, Inc.*, 573 U.S. 258, 274 (2014) (citation omitted). This is particularly so here given the primacy accorded Congress in Indian affairs. *See Michigan v. Bay Mills Indian Cmty.*, 572 U.S. 782, 799 (2014) (“Congress exercises primary authority in this area and ‘remains free to alter what we have done’—another factor that gives ‘special force’ to *stare decisis*.”).

Oklahoma nevertheless asks this Court to overrule itself in short order. In doing so, it confuses the Court for a political branch, its decisions subject to reversal with the change of seasons. Oklahoma’s Governor and Attorney General have publicly acknowledged one of the reasons they believe their strategy might succeed. “The Supreme Court has a new member now, Amy Coney Barrett has replaced Ginsburg ... so there’s a possibility the court would overturn [*McGirt*][.]” Dick Pryor, *Capitol Insider: Governor Kevin Stitt on State-Tribal Relations*, KGOU (Feb. 5, 2021);² *see also* Janelle Stecklein, *Experts: Supreme Court could clarify McGirt ruling, won’t overturn it*, *Enid News & Eagle* (Aug. 19, 2021) (“So we have a different configuration [on the Court] that might have a different view of how to approach this[.]” (quoting Attorney General O’Connor)).³ But this Court is not

² <https://www.kgou.org/politics-and-government/2021-02-05/capitol-insider-governor-kevin-stitt-on-state-tribal-relations>.

³ <https://www.enidnews.com/news/politics/experts-supreme-court-could-clarify-mcgirt-ruling-wont-overturn-it/article-9b06385c-0130-11ec-90e3-0786aebb5a34.html>.

a city council and has never viewed a change in composition as a springboard for abandoning precedent. *See, e.g., June Med. Servs. L.L.C. v. Russo*, 140 S. Ct. 2103, 2134 (2020) (Roberts, C.J., concurring in the judgment) (“It has long been an established rule to abide by former precedents ... as well to keep the scale of justice even and steady, and not liable to waver with every new judge’s opinion.... The constraint of precedent distinguishes the judicial method and philosophy from those of the political and legislative process.”).

Oklahoma’s petitions have been less nakedly political, claiming instead that *McGirt* has created enormous criminal and civil disruption that only its overruling can rectify. But as the next sections demonstrate, these arguments dissolve upon contact with reality and provide an equally inapt basis for abrupt reversal.

II. There Exists No Crisis of Criminal Jurisdiction on the Creek Reservation.

A. *McGirt* has not rendered eastern Oklahoma a criminal dystopia. The day it issued, Oklahoma’s three United States Attorneys released a joint statement expressing confidence that “tribal, state, local, and federal law enforcement [would] work together to continue providing exceptional public safety under

this new ruling[.]”⁴ The Creek Nation likewise committed to “continu[ing] to work with federal and state law enforcement agencies to ensure” public safety within the Reservation.⁵ As detailed below, the federal government and the Nation have honored these commitments, and Oklahoma’s disregard for the resulting successes provides no basis for review.

Oklahoma’s contrary narrative is driven by hyperbole and unsubstantiated numbers. Matters potentially subject to re prosecution after *McGirt* initially included post-conviction cases and convictions still on appeal when *McGirt* issued. The federal government and the Nation took up re prosecutions in both categories.⁶ But as this Court presaged, *McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2479, the OCCA has since held that *McGirt* does not apply retroactively to state post-conviction proceedings, see *State ex rel. Matloff v. Wallace*, 2021 OK CR 21 (Aug. 12, 2021), *petition for cert. filed*, No. 21-467 (U.S. Sept. 29, 2021), and has applied *Matloff* to vacate prior grants of post-conviction relief, see, e.g., *Bosse v. State*, 2021 OK CR 23 (Aug.

⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/joint-statement-united-states-attorneys-northern-eastern-and-western-districts-oklahoma>.

⁵ <https://www.muscogeeation.com/muscogee-creek-nation-statement-regarding-u-s-supreme-court-decision/>.

⁶ See, e.g., *Jimcy McGirt Sentenced To Life Imprisonment*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Aug. 25, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edok/pr/jimcy-mcgirt-sentenced-life-imprisonment>; *Patrick Dwayne Murphy Found Guilty By Federal Jury*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Aug. 5, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edok/pr/patrick-dwayne-murphy-found-guilty-federal-jury>.

31, 2021).⁷ The vast majority of prior State convictions accordingly will remain unaffected by *McGirt*.

B. Cases requiring reprosecution, then, have narrowed to those that were on direct appeal when *McGirt* issued and in which a defendant has raised a *McGirt* claim. See *McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2479 (“[D]efendants may choose to finish their state sentences rather than risk reprosecution in federal court where sentences can be graver.”). Oklahoma does not dispute that this is a small set.⁸ And direct appeal

⁷ The exception is where the State failed to preserve a procedural bar argument, as in one notorious case that the State has nevertheless sought to capitalize on in press reports. See *Oklahoma v. Priddy*, No. PR-2021-874 (Okla. Crim. App. Sept. 3, 2021) (order declining jurisdiction); Annie Gowen & Robert Barnes, ‘Complete, dysfunctional chaos’: Oklahoma reels after Supreme Court ruling on Indian tribes, *Washington Post* (July 24, 2021). But ill-considered litigation decisions by the State do not justify revisiting well-considered precedent, especially where the federal government and the Nation are working to rectify Oklahoma’s mistakes. See *Muscogee (Creek) Nation Charges Woman With 5 Counts Of Murder After State Case Dismissed*, *News On 6* (Apr. 30, 2021), <https://www.news6.com/story/608c6ffb0f30d00bcc254caf/muscogee-creek-nation-charges-woman-with-5-counts-of-murder-after-state-case-dismissed>.

⁸ The State is regularly filing petitions in this Court from direct appeal cases dismissed due to *McGirt*. Only forty-three direct appeal petitions have been docketed as of December 13, and there is no indication in the state court dockets that this number will grow exponentially. The State has also filed one petition from a State court order dismissing charges pre-conviction. See *Oklahoma v. McCurtain*, No. 21-773. The State does not dispute that the final number of direct appeal cases impacted by *McGirt* may be well below one hundred. See *Castro-Huerta* Opp’n 25; Reply.

cases are, by definition, more recent, mitigating Oklahoma’s concerns about federal or tribal statutes of limitations expiring (regardless of potential tolling and laches arguments) and evidence growing stale.

The federal government and the Nation are indeed reprosecuting these matters (often with substantial assistance from local law enforcement).⁹ Of the forty-three respondents in the forty-four petitions docketed as of December 13, 2021,¹⁰ at least forty-one are already being reprosecuted by either the federal government (thirty-six cases)¹¹ or the relevant tribal

⁹ See *infra* n.21 (communications from the U.S. Attorney’s Offices for the Northern and Eastern Districts listing joint investigations between the FBI, the Tulsa Police Department, the Nation’s Lighthorse Police, and numerous local law enforcement departments resulting in indictments).

¹⁰ Oklahoma has filed two petitions involving Floyd Ball, Jr., Nos. 21-327, 21-644.

¹¹ Seventeen respondents are being reprosecuted in the Eastern District of Oklahoma: *U.S. v. Bain*, 6:20-CR-00139; *U.S. v. Ball*, 6:20-CR-00110; *U.S. v. Beck*, 6:21-CR-00142; *U.S. v. Brown*, 6:20-CR-00109; *U.S. v. Coffman*, 6:21-CR-00324; *U.S. v. Cooper*, 6:21-CR-00070; *U.S. v. Fox*, 6:21-MJ-00251; *U.S. v. Grayson*, 6:21-CR-00166; *U.S. v. Harjo*, 6:21-CR-00022; *U.S. v. Hathcoat*, 6:21-CR-00018; *U.S. v. Johnson*, 6:21-CR-00183; *U.S. v. Shawn Jones*, 6:21-CR-00118; *U.S. v. David Martin*, 6:21-CR-00221; *U.S. v. Laurie Martin*, 6:21-CR-00047; *U.S. v. McDaniel*, 6:21-CR-00321; *U.S. v. Sizemore*, 6:21-CR-00138; *U.S. v. Vineyard*, 6:21-CR-00056. Nineteen respondents are being reprosecuted in the Northern District of Oklahoma: *U.S. v. Calhoun et al.* (Castro-Huerta), 4:20-CR-00255; *U.S. v. Cottingham*, 4:20-CR-00209; *U.S. v. Davis*, 4:20-CR-00316; *U.S. v. Foster*, 4:21-CR-00118; *U.S. v. Howell*, 4:21-CR-00121; *U.S. v. Jackson*, 4:20-CR-00310; *U.S. v. Janson*, 4:21-CR-00197; *U.S. v. Jeffery Jones*, 4:21-CR-00023; *U.S. v. Kepler*, 4:20-CR-00276; *U.S. v. Leathers*, 4:21-CR-

government (five cases).¹² Fifteen respondents have been reconvicted.¹³ Another twenty, including Respondent here, have jury trials scheduled.¹⁴

The reprosecutions, moreover, are occurring swiftly. Direct appeal cases raising a *McGirt* claim are typically remanded from the OCCA to the state trial court for an evidentiary hearing regarding Indian status before vacatur by the OCCA. In thirteen of the cases underlying Oklahoma’s petitions, the United States obtained a federal grand jury indictment *before* the state trial court had even issued its

00163; *U.S. v. Little*, 4:21-CR-00162; *U.S. v. McCombs et al.*, 4:20-CR-00262; *U.S. v. Mitchell*, 4:20-CR-00254; *U.S. v. Mize*, 4:21-CR-00107; *U.S. v. Perry*, 4:20-CR-00218; *U.S. v. Spears*, 4:20-CR-00296; *U.S. v. Stewart*, 4:20-CR-00260; *U.S. v. Williams*, 4:21-CR-00104; *U.S. v. Yargee*, 4:21-CR-00313. Charges may have been filed against any juvenile respondents such as Bryce Miller, No. 21-643, under seal.

¹² See *Muscogee (Creek) Nation v. Epperson*, CF-2021-0973 (2021), <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/20211007160405502.pdf>; *Muscogee (Creek) Nation v. Starr*, CF-2021-0884, CM-2021-0591 (2021), <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/20211007160624161.pdf>; *Cherokee Nation v. Shriver*, CNCR-CRM-21-56 (2021); *Cherokee Nation v. Perales*, CRM-21-261 (2021); *Choctaw Nation v. McCurtain*, CF-21-0150 (2021), <https://choctawnationportalprod.tylerhost.net/Portal/Home/WorkspaceMode?p=0> (search “McCurtain, Harold”).

¹³ See *Beck; Brown; Calhoun (Castro-Huerta); Cottingham; Foster; Harjo; Jackson; Janson; Jeffery Jones; Kepler; Laurie Martin; Mitchell; Mize; Stewart; Yargee*, *supra* n.11.

¹⁴ See *Bain; Ball; Coffman; Cooper; Davis; Grayson; Hathcoat; Howell; Johnson; Shawn Jones; Leathers; Little; David Martin; McCombs; McDaniel; Perry; Sizemore; Spears; Williams*, *supra* n.11; *McCurtain*, *supra* n.12.

findings on remand.¹⁵ And in the remaining federal cases, the United States filed a complaint or indicted the respondent before or contemporaneous with issuance of the State court mandate.¹⁶

In sum, Oklahoma's Chicken Little narrative is just that. As the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Oklahoma at the time of *McGirt* and for many months thereafter has put it:

[W]hat we see in actuality is that the sky isn't falling. That we can actually and should be promoting confidence in what is and has been great partnerships among state, tribal and federal law enforcement entities.

Allison Herrera, *Trent Shores Reflects On His Time As U.S. Attorney*, KOSU (Feb. 24, 2021).¹⁷ In the

¹⁵ Compare the federal dockets, *supra* n.11, and state dockets for *Bain*, C-2019-853 (state); *Ball*, F-2020-54; *Castro-Huerta* (Calhoun), F-2017-1203; *Cottingham*, F-2017-1294; *Foster*, F-2020-149; *Kepler*, F-2017-1186; *Leathers*, F-2019-962; *Little*, F-2020-125; *Mitchell*, F-2018-78; *McCombs*, F-2017-1000; *Perry*, F-2020-46; *Stewart*, C-2017-1223; *Vineyard*, F-2020-245.

¹⁶ Compare the federal dockets, *supra* n.11, and state dockets for *Beck*, F-2019-115 (state); *Brown*, C-2018-1118; *Cooper*, F-2018-830; *Davis*, F-2019-420; *Fox*, F-2019-196; *Grayson*, F-2018-1229; *Harjo*, F-2017-889; *Hathcoat*, F-2018-898; *Howell*, C-2017-998; *Jackson*, F-2016-453; *Janson*, C-2017-1027; *Johnson*, F-2020-208; *Jeffery Jones*, F-2017-1245; *Shawn Jones*, F-2017-1309; *David Martin*, F-2016-1030; *Laurie Martin*, F-2017-991; *McDaniel*, F-2017-357; *Mize*, F-2019-68; *Sizemore*, F-2018-1140; *Spears*, F-2019-330; *Williams*, F-2016-937; *Yargee*, F-2019-392.

¹⁷ <https://www.kosu.org/politics/2021-02-24/trent-shores-reflects-on-his-time-as-u-s-attorney-remains-committed-to-justice-for-indian-country>.

reply brief that serves as the capstone of its efforts before this Court, *Castro-Huerta* Reply, Oklahoma fails to engage with this on-the-ground reality, exposing its rhetoric for what it is: opposition to a shift in authority, rather than a concern for public safety.¹⁸

C. New cases within the Creek Reservation are also being vigorously prosecuted with necessary resources increasing apace.

1. a. The federal government is regularly securing indictments in hundreds of new cases.¹⁹ Oklahoma itself acknowledges that the federal government has filed charges in 1,000 cases since *McGirt*. See *Castro-Huerta* Reply 8. Contrary to the uncited assertions by the State, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 20, Reply 6–7, those prosecutions are not limited to crimes involving serious bodily injury.²⁰ Nor is it correct to say, as the State’s amici would have it, that the federal government is not prosecuting cases including

¹⁸ The State has made shorthand arguments in every petition but one, *Castro-Huerta*, No. 21-429, and has instead asked the Court to refer to its *Castro-Huerta* filings. The Nation accordingly cites to that petition, reply, and the amicus briefs submitted in that matter, throughout.

¹⁹ See generally News, U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Okla., <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr> (last visited Nov. 13, 2021) (monthly indictment press releases listing hundreds of indictments post-*McGirt*); News, U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Okla., <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edok/pr> (last visited Nov. 13, 2021) (same).

²⁰ E.g., *infra* n.21 (listing prosecutions for burglary, stolen vehicle possession, stolen property receipt, and other crimes not involving serious bodily injury).

“stabbing in a limb without loss of function,” *Castro-Huerta* Dist. Att’y Br. 20, “strangulation not causing death,” *id.*, attacks against Tulsa police officers, *Castro-Huerta* Tulsa/Owasso Br. 7, “first-degree burglary cases from Tulsa,” *id.* 8, or “second- and third-degree burglaries,” *id.*²¹

To support the enhanced prosecutorial efforts, the FBI has sent “140 Special Agents, Investigative Analysts, Victims Specialists and other professional staff to” eastern Oklahoma and “expanded State, local, and tribal participation on task forces ... from 32 agencies to assist with initial response and investigative efforts.” Hearing on Federal Bureau of

²¹ See, e.g., *Federal Grand Jury B Indictments Announced—October*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Oct. 15, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/federal-grand-jury-b-indictments-announced-october-1> (stabbing arm, first-degree burglary, possessing and concealing a stolen vehicle); *United States Attorney’s Office for Eastern District of Oklahoma Obtains Forty-Six Indictments From Federal Grand Juries*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Oct. 1, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edok/pr/united-states-attorneys-office-eastern-district-oklahoma-obtains-forty-six-indictments> (second-degree burglary, third-degree burglary); *Federal Grand Jury A Indictments Announced—September*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Sept. 10, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/federal-grand-jury-indictments-announced-september> (eluding Tulsa Police, burglary, carjacking, strangulation, receipt of stolen property); *Federal Grand Jury A Indictments Announced—May*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (May 5, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/federal-grand-jury-indictments-announced-may> (assaulting and eluding Tulsa County deputies); *Federal Grand Jury A Indictments Announced for December*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Dec. 9, 2020), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/federal-grand-jury-indictments-announced-december> (third-degree burglary, robbery, theft).

Investigation Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2022 Before the Subcomm. on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies of the S. Comm. on Appropriations, 117th Cong. 13–14 (June 2021) (statement of FBI Director Wray). The United States Attorney’s Offices for the Eastern and Northern Districts have hired additional prosecutors, with plans for more. *Id.* at 14.²² And prosecutors have been detailed from across the country to supplement this staffing.²³ There has been no “nationwide APB,” in the State’s alarmist terms, *Castro-Huerta* Reply 6—just a responsible effort by the federal government to increase prosecutorial resources, and an answering of the call of duty by responsible professionals.

The federal courts are likewise adding capacity. The Eastern District has designated seven judges from other districts to hear cases through at least the end of this year, General Order 21-10 (May 21, 2021), as well as additional magistrate judges, General Order 21-9 (Apr. 30, 2021). In the longer term, the Judicial Conference has recommended that Congress

²² See also, e.g., *24 Federal Prosecutors Take the Oath of Office in the Northern District of Oklahoma*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Sept. 29, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndok/pr/24-federal-prosecutors-take-oath-office-northern-district-oklahoma>.

²³ See U.S. Dep’t of Justice, *FY 2022 Budget Request* 1–2, <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/page/file/1398851/download>; *Acting United States Attorney For The Eastern District Of Oklahoma Issues Statement Regarding OCCA Decisions Of Hogner And Bosse*, U.S. Attorney’s Office (Mar. 11, 2021), <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edok/pr/acting-united-states-attorney-eastern-district-oklahoma-issues-statement-regarding-occa>.

authorize five new federal judgeships in Oklahoma. *Judiciary Supplements Judgeship Request, Prioritizes Courthouse Projects*, U.S. Courts (Sept. 28, 2021).²⁴

The State dismisses these developments, contending that civil trials are delayed in the Northern District, and that the Eastern District has declared an emergency that requires some parties “to travel to the Western District[.]” *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 21; Reply 7. But the delay in civil trials is no different from that occurring in courthouses across the country due to the pandemic, and parties can elect to proceed before a magistrate judge in the meantime. *See, e.g., Feenstra v. Sigler*, No. 19-CV-00234 (N.D. Okla. July 28, 2021) (minute order). And while some parties may need to travel to Oklahoma City instead of Muskogee, the cities are just two hours apart, and for many Eastern District residents the former is closer. Again, this is hardly the stuff of crisis.

b. Going forward, Congress is taking steps to ensure that federal agencies have ample resources to handle post-*McGirt* caseloads. Oklahoma cites testimony from FBI Director Wray about new demands on the agency, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 19–20, but omits that in response the House Appropriations Committee voted to fully fund the Justice Department’s budgetary request for *McGirt* implementation, including for

²⁴ <https://www.uscourts.gov/news/2021/09/28/judiciary-supplements-judgeship-request-prioritizes-courthouse-projects>.

the Bureau, H.R. Rep. No. 117-97, at 63 (2021);²⁵ *see also* U.S. Dep’t of Justice, *FY 2022 Budget Request 1–2*.²⁶ House Bill 4505, now before the full House, provides \$70 million “to implement public safety measures required to comply with the *McGirt* decision,” H.R. Rep. No. 117-97, at 63, including \$33 million for Oklahoma’s U.S. Attorney’s Offices, DOJ *FY 2022 Budget Request 2*, and \$25.5 million for the FBI, which the FBI reports “will allow [it] to effectively address the increased operational need,” FBI, *FY 2022 Budget Request 122*.²⁷ The Committee further directed the Justice Department “to closely monitor the *McGirt*-related enforcement programs and provide the Committee as soon as possible an estimate of [the] long-term costs of sustaining those programs.” H.R. Rep. No. 117-97, at 63.

2. The Creek Nation is likewise committing substantial resources to implementing *McGirt*. In the fifteen months immediately following *McGirt*, the Nation investigated and prosecuted 2,771 felony and misdemeanor cases.²⁸ To make this possible, the Lighthorse Police hired twenty new police officers, ten investigators, two Sexual Offender Registration

²⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/117/crpt/hrpt97/CRPT-117hrpt97.pdf>.

²⁶ *Supra* n.23.

²⁷ <https://www.justice.gov/jmd/page/file/1399031/download>.

²⁸ Affidavit of Roger Wiley, <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Roger-Wiley-Affidavit.pdf>.

officers, and six dispatchers.²⁹ Additional hirings will soon follow, with the Lighthorse budget more than doubling since *McGirt*.³⁰

The Nation has also hired six new prosecutors and twelve public defenders.³¹ It is adding judges and has significantly expanded its courthouse and detention facility capacity.³²

Furthermore, the Nation has continued to enter into cross-deputization agreements, including with state agencies, empowering non-tribal officers to exercise federal and tribal authority within the Reservation.³³ The Nation also adopted a new traffic code that deliberately mirrors Oklahoma's, enabling cross-deputized officers to enforce provisions with which they are familiar. *See* MCNCA tit. 14, ch. 3.³⁴

²⁹ Affidavit of Richard Phillips, <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Richard-Phillips.pdf>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Wiley Affidavit, *supra* n.28; Affidavit of Cynthia Freeman, <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Cynthia-Freeman.pdf>.

³² Affidavit of Shannon Prescott, <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Shannon-Prescott.pdf>; Phillips Affidavit, *supra* n.29.

³³ *See* Okla. Sec'y of State, *Tribal Compacts and Agreements*, <https://www.sos.ok.gov/gov/tribal.aspx> (last visited Nov. 13, 2021) (enter "Creek" into "Doc Type" and select "Submit," *see, e.g.,* #50646).

³⁴ <http://www.creeksupremecourt.com/wp-content/uploads/NCA-20-087.pdf>.

D. Ignoring all this, Oklahoma continually resorts to uncited, back-of-the-envelope estimates of a purported prosecutorial “gap.” See *Castro-Huerta* Reply 3, 7–8. In its *Castro-Huerta* petition, the State estimated, without citation, that the federal government and the Five Tribes should be filing approximately 4,000 to 5,000 non-traffic criminal cases per year. See *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 20. Yet when faced with the fact that the federal government and the Creek Nation alone filed more than 3,700 felony and misdemeanor cases in the fifteen months immediately following *McGirt*, Creek *Castro-Huerta* Br. 11, 16; *supra* 11, and that the other four Tribes filed more than 4,000 such cases in the handful of months immediately following final adjudication of their Reservations, *Castro-Huerta* Opp’n 30–31 n.30, the State has now changed its estimate to 18,000 “crimes” per year, *Castro-Huerta* Reply 8, again without any citation. This Court, the Tribes, the federal government, and all the citizens of eastern Oklahoma deserve better. The truth is that substantial efforts are being made by responsible governments to prosecute crimes in keeping with *McGirt*. Oklahoma’s moving target of entirely unsupported numbers does not undermine that reality. And the fact that there has been a reallocation in authority does not connote chaos, no matter how much Oklahoma may dislike the change.³⁵

³⁵ In its *Castro-Huerta* reply briefing, Oklahoma does not defend its prior tale about 911 callers, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 21–22, perhaps recognizing that the tale is not only unsubstantiated

The State’s amici make claims that are likewise far off the mark, claims again grounded in uncited assertions, *see, e.g., Castro-Huerta* Tulsa/Owasso Br. 3, 5–8; *Castro-Huerta* Dist. Att’y Br. 14, 15, 17, 20–23, and hearsay statements from unidentified sources, *Castro-Huerta* Dist. Att’y Br. 3, 7–9, 11–12, 15–16, 20. No district court in this country would countenance unsubstantiated assertions of this sort. Nor should this Court, particularly since many of the claims are demonstrably incorrect.³⁶ Tulsa asserts, for example, that the Nation has not prosecuted “any” of the “dozens” of domestic violence cases Tulsa has referred to the Nation. *Castro-Huerta* Tulsa/Owasso Br. 10. But the Nation takes domestic violence matters extremely seriously and has already secured convictions in over a dozen domestic violence cases referred to it by Tulsa while filing charges in 119 more.³⁷ Nor do the two specific Creek Reservation episodes that Tulsa claims have gone unprosecuted fit the description. *See id.* 8–9, 10 (indecent exposure and domestic violence). Offenders in both instances are being prosecuted by the Nation.³⁸ Assertions about subpoenas, *Castro-Huerta*

but also predicated on illegal State discrimination. *See* Creek *Castro-Huerta* Br. 17–18.

³⁶ *See also supra* 11–12.

³⁷ Wiley Affidavit, *supra* n.28.

³⁸ Wiley Affidavit, *supra* n.28; *Muscogee (Creek) Nation v. Dillard*, CF-2021-0849 (2021), <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Dillard-CCI.pdf>; *Muscogee (Creek) Nation v. Watashe*, CF-2021-1241 (2021), <https://www.muscogeenation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Watashe-CCI.pdf>.

Tulsa/Owasso Br. 2–3, 9–10, *Castro-Huerta* Dist. Att’y Br. 7; warrants, *Castro-Huerta* Tulsa/Owasso Br. 6; and detention and bond amounts, *id.* 11–12, *Castro-Huerta* Dist. Att’y Br. 8, likewise are contradicted by the facts.³⁹

In *McGirt*, this Court rejected Oklahoma’s overheated claims about criminal consequences, stating that with a reallocation of prosecutorial resources “it doesn’t take a lot of imagination to see how things could work out in the end.” *McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2480. This well describes developments on the Creek Reservation. Thanks to substantial efforts by the federal and tribal governments, things are working out, and the unsubstantiated claims by Oklahoma and its amici provide no basis for the State’s extraordinary request of this Court.

III. Civil Society Has Not Plunged into Chaos on the Creek Reservation.

Oklahoma’s claims of civil crisis are similarly estranged from fact.

A. Most telling about the State’s arguments are the omissions. In *McGirt* and *Murphy*, Oklahoma made alarmist claims that “[a]ll adoptions and custody disputes involving Indian children ... would fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of tribal courts,” and “[s]ettled child placements [could] be undone.” Okla.

³⁹ Wiley Affidavit, *supra* n.28.

McGirt Br. 44; Okla. *Murphy* Br. 56. But the Nation assured the Court that existing placements could be preserved and jurisdiction shared through compacting, *see* Creek *McGirt* Br. 44–45; *McGirt* Oral Arg. Tr. 41, and this is precisely what happened. Within a month of *McGirt*, the Nation and the State entered a child custody compact that preserves existing placements and maintains cooperative jurisdiction going forward.⁴⁰ The State’s briefing mentions none of this.

B. The Nation also told the Court that claims by Oklahoma and its amici that (a) the Nation would tax and regulate non-Indian individuals and entities within the Reservation, and (b) the State and local governments would correspondingly lose authority over them, ignored the presumptive constraints this Court’s jurisprudence places on tribal jurisdiction over non-Indians. *See* Okla. *Murphy* Br. 56; Okla. Suppl. *Murphy* Br. 15; Creek *McGirt* Br. 43–44; Creek *Murphy* Br. 31–36. And in the wake of *McGirt*, Oklahoma points to not a single example of the Nation attempting to tax or regulate non-Indians.⁴¹ The

⁴⁰ Intergovernmental Agreement (Aug. 4, 2020), <https://www.sos.ok.gov/documents/filelog/93632.pdf>; *see also* H.B. 2352, 2021 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2021) (unanimously ratifying the Compact).

⁴¹ The Environmental Federation of Oklahoma et al. cite several of the Nation’s statutes and posit that the Nation “may” apply these statutes to non-Indians. *Castro-Huerta* Br. 20. But the Nation understands that it can only enforce its statutes consistent with federal law. Nor does Tulsa’s reliance on a news article citing a pre-*McGirt*, non-legal letter regarding trust property move the needle. *Castro-Huerta* Tulsa/Owasso Br. 12 n.13.

only challenge it cites to its regulatory authority is a flimsy claim by a non-Indian corporation, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 24, which the State’s Corporation Commission has flatly rejected, *see Canaan Resources X v. Calyx Energy III, LLC*, No. CO-119245 (Okla. Corp. Comm’n Nov. 25, 2020).⁴² That a single non-Indian entity has attempted, and thus far failed, to exploit *McGirt* for its own purposes hardly evidences a crisis. Nor does the smattering of other civil cases—four in total, *see Castro-Huerta* Pet. 24–26—cited by Oklahoma. Several are facially flawed, and the State has notched an initial victory in at least one. *See Nicholson v. Stitt*, No. SD-119270 (Okla.). If questionable litigation were the marker of chaos, the entire country would be under a reign of terror.⁴³ Civil society in eastern Oklahoma is sturdier than the State would have the Court believe.

C. Under well-established law, reservation status does have consequences for Oklahoma’s taxing

The Nation has been clear, including in briefing to this Court, *Creek Murphy* Br. 35–36, regarding state and local taxing authority over non-Indian businesses on fee lands within the Reservation.

⁴² <https://www.oscn.net/dockets/GetCaseInformation.aspx?db=appellate&number=119245> (order included in Dec. 8, 2020 petition in error).

⁴³ The concerns expressed by title insurance companies, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 24–25, likewise do not signify chaos. If the companies need help with jurisdictional disclaimers, they can look to their colleagues in other states where “millions of acres of non-Indian fee land” are found within reservations. *Plains Commerce Bank v. Long Family Land and Cattle Co.*, 554 U.S. 316, 328 (2008).

authority over certain tribal members. But as the Oklahoma Tax Commission has detailed in a report far more measured than the State’s briefing, those impacts again are hardly the stuff of crisis. See Oklahoma Tax Commission, *Report of Potential Impact of McGirt v. Oklahoma* (Sept. 30, 2020).⁴⁴

The Commission estimates a maximum potential annual revenue impact of \$72.7 million in reduced income taxes and \$132.2 million in reduced sales taxes for all Five Tribes total. *Id.* 2, 14–18. The Commission states that these estimates are likely high due to data limitations and the uncertain assumption that all eligible tribal citizens will seek available exemptions.⁴⁵ *Id.* 16–18. The Commission estimates minimal impact on other taxes, including motor vehicle taxes, gross production and petroleum excise taxes, and ad valorem taxes. *Id.* 3, 11–13, 19.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ <https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/tax/documents/resources/reports/other/McGirt%20vs%20OK%20-%20Potential%20Impact%20Report.pdf>.

⁴⁵ To be clear, individuals are not now “refusing” to pay income and sales tax, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 24. Under state and federal law, Oklahoma is no longer permitted to tax tribal citizens for on-reservation activities. Some tribal citizens are thus following the state process to file for exemptions.

⁴⁶ Under Oklahoma state law, tribal citizens can also recover up to three years of prior income tax payments, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 24, with refunds coming from the State’s “Income Tax Withholding Refund Account,” Okla. Stat. tit. 68, § 2373. Even if every eligible tribal citizen claimed the refund, that would amount at most to an additional one-time impact of \$214 million. *Supra* n.44, at 16–17.

A maximum annual impact of approximately \$200 million will not “decimate” state tax budgets, Okla. *McGirt* Br. 44. Overall state revenues (excluding higher education) exceeded \$64.5 billion in fiscal year 2020–21, with general fund revenues exceeding \$47.3 billion.⁴⁷ Tax revenues for that period exceeded \$16.8 billion.⁴⁸ Indeed, so confident are state leaders in the State’s fiscal condition that a \$500 million income tax cut “sailed through the Oklahoma House of Representatives” this past spring.⁴⁹ And the State Treasurer recently reported that the State’s “[g]ross receipts demonstrate a resilient and expanding state economy,” with “[e]very major revenue stream, including income taxes, exceed[ing] collections from 2019.”⁵⁰

Further, any tax impacts will be offset by savings in other areas, including reduced state prosecution and incarceration needs. See Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force, *Final Report* 3 (Feb. 2017) (discussing the “extraordinary” cost of incarceration for

⁴⁷ See *State Revenue*, OK.gov, <https://stories.opengov.com/oklahomastate/published/XzJD1j7zP> (last visited Nov. 13, 2021).

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ Randy Krehbiel, *Oklahoma House passes \$500 million income tax reduction*, Tulsa World (Mar. 11, 2021), https://tulsa-world.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/oklahoma-house-passes-500-million-income-tax-reduction/article_1b1323c6-82b9-11eb-a093-3702ce3e7488.html.

⁵⁰ Kevin Severin, *Substantial gains anticipated for future Oklahoma collection*, Fox 25 (Aug. 4, 2021), <https://okcfox.com/news/local/substantial-gains-anticipated-for-future-oklahoma-collections>.

the State).⁵¹ And Oklahoma continues to ignore the benefits to reservation residents, Indian and non-Indian, from significant tribal governmental expenditures, Creek *McGirt* Br. 36–40; Chickasaw and Choctaw *McGirt* Br. 8–13.

Any tax impacts to Oklahoma could be further alleviated through compacting. *See McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2481; Oklahoma Tax Commission Report 3, 20–21 (stating that tax compacts “could significantly mitigate” impacts; that compacts “have been a powerful tool for facilitating cooperation and revenue-sharing between tribal and state governments”; and that “[d]uring the last two fiscal years, the State received over \$73 million in cigarette and tobacco tax collections as a result of compact sales”). Focused as it is on overturning *McGirt*, Oklahoma has not sought to engage in tax negotiations; but as the history of successful State-Tribal compacting (so recently reprised in the child custody context) demonstrates, this need not remain a permanent state of affairs.

D. As *McGirt* acknowledged, there may be implications for the application of various federal statutes on the Creek Reservation, 140 S. Ct. at 2480, but again Oklahoma has pointed to nothing portending chaos. The State mentions only that the Department of the Interior has asserted that federal implementation of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, 30 U.S.C. §§ 1201–1328, is appropriate within

⁵¹ [https://s3.amazonaws.com/content.newsok.com/documents/OJRTFFinalReport%20\(1\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/content.newsok.com/documents/OJRTFFinalReport%20(1).pdf).

the Reservation, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 25, but nowhere explains why enhanced reclamation of mining waste spells doom for Oklahoma.

IV. Congress Is Actively Engaged in Protecting Public Safety on the Creek Reservation.

Having conjured illusory chaos in eastern Oklahoma, the State then waves its wand in the other direction, claiming that Congress's ability to address that chaos has evaporated, leaving the Court no choice but to usurp the legislative function. *See Castro-Huerta* Pet. 28.

Compounding the disrespect for Congress inherent in the argument, its premise is demonstrably invalid. Congress has actively engaged in eastern Oklahoma post-*McGirt*. For example, as discussed above, a bill to fully fund the Justice Department's increased responsibilities is currently advancing through Congress. *Supra* at 14–15. Oklahoma does not mention this. Nor does it mention that Oklahoma's Governor opposes the bill because, according to his special counsel, "there are uncertainties surrounding this [*McGirt*] decision, that are currently working their way to the courts So there's no need for a permanent federal fix here."⁵² These words hardly reflect a state in crisis.

⁵² Reese Gorman, *Cole encourages state-tribal relations over state challenge to McGirt*, *The Norman Transcript* (Jul. 23, 2021), <https://www.normantranscript.com/news/cole->

The House Appropriations Committee also approved the Interior Department’s fiscal year 2022 request, *see* H.R. 4502, 117th Cong. (1st Sess. 2021), for \$11 million in Bureau of Indian Affairs funding for tribes “to implement public safety changes resulting from [*McGirt*.]” H.R. Rep. No. 117-83, at 55–57 (2021).⁵³ And the Committee has directed the Bureau “to provide a longer term cost estimate ... to implement the *McGirt* decision within 120 days of enactment of this Act.” *Id.* at 55. The bill passed the full House and is before the Senate.⁵⁴ Notwithstanding professed concerns for public safety, the Governor’s office opposes this funding as well.⁵⁵

Congressional action has gone beyond appropriations. On May 11, 2021, Congressman Cole introduced legislation to authorize the Cherokee and Chickasaw Nations to enter compacts providing for concurrent state criminal jurisdiction on their reservation fee lands. H.R. 3091, 117th Cong. (1st Sess. 2021). Congressman Cole would no doubt be surprised to learn that he believes a bill into which he

[encourages-state-tribal-relations-over-state-challenges-to-mcgirt/article_e15e2378-eb4b-11eb-80f4-c39595196dbb.html](https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/117th-congress/house-report/83/1?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22h.+rept.+117-83%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1).

⁵³ <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/117th-congress/house-report/83/1?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22h.+rept.+117-83%22%5D%7D&s=1&r=1>.

⁵⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/4502/actions>.

⁵⁵ Gorman, *supra* n.52.

put “many, many months of work”⁵⁶ was dead on arrival, *Castro-Huerta* Pet. 27, and the cited article says nothing of the sort.⁵⁷ Rather, it underscores the Congressman’s view that the bill will become law only with considerable work, which is hardly surprising since “pass[ing] new legislation is a deliberately hard business under our Constitution,” *McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2462. Senator Lankford is also actively discussing potential legislative approaches to the allocation of criminal jurisdiction.⁵⁸

The Creek Nation has not yet endorsed any legislative adjustment of criminal jurisdiction, but rather is focused on prosecuting reservation crimes in conjunction with the federal government, and on assessing the effectiveness of that collaboration. There is nothing untoward about such deliberation (or about the fact that the different Tribes might take varying policy positions on these serious issues). Determining the optimal approach to public safety within the Creek Reservation is a governmental priority of the highest order, one that calls for careful consideration

⁵⁶ Chris Casteel, *With Oklahoma tribes deeply divided, Rep. Tom Cole’s McGirt bill faces long road*, *The Oklahoman* (June 14, 2021), <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/news/2021/05/16/oklahoma-tribes-divided-over-tom-cole-bill-addressing-mcgirt-ruling/5063947001/>.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Kelci McKendrick, *Lankford visits Enid, discusses various topics*, *Enid News & Eagle* (Aug. 19, 2021), https://www.enid-news.com/news/lankford-visits-enid-discusses-various-topics/article_0769c2ac-015e-11ec-b799-d3018ac1cd29.html.

rather than Oklahoma's preferred approach of a rush to judgment—or a rush back to this Court.

Especially in the absence of demonstrated need, legislation can take time. What will facilitate any necessary legislation (and further cooperative agreements) is if the Court disabuses Oklahoma of the notion that a precedent of this Court can be dismissed as an unwelcome house guest, here today but hopefully gone tomorrow. For one thing is clear: There has been no groundswell in Congress to disestablish the Creek or the other Five Tribes' reservations after *McGirt*. Rather, there exists a solemn appreciation of the importance of abiding by the treaty promises vindicated by this Court while providing the resources necessary to do so. With Congress not inclined to disestablish, Oklahoma has returned to this Court and urged it to do what "only Congress" properly can. *McGirt*, 140 S. Ct. at 2474. This Court should decline the invitation.

CONCLUSION

The petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.

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