



**NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS
NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
NATIONAL INDIAN HEALTH BOARD
NATIONAL INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ASSOCIATION**

December 6, 2013

Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Jerry Moran
Ranking Member, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Re: FY 2014 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Moran,

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Education Association, National Indian Health Board, and National Indian Child Welfare Association, we write to remind members of the Labor-Health and Human Services (HHS)-Education Appropriations Subcommittee of the importance of these funds in Indian Country. The programs in this Subcommittee's jurisdiction often provide the only funding available in tribal communities to serve the most vulnerable tribal members. These funds mean the difference between a job and unemployment, heat or a freezing home, abuse or safety, and a diploma or empty hand. In crafting a final FY 2014 appropriations bill, we respectfully urge you restore funding for some of the key programs in this Subcommittee's jurisdiction: Section 166 of the Workforce Investment Act, Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Child Welfare Services, Low Income Energy Assistance Program, Impact Aid, and Title VII.

Department of Labor - Investment in Native American Workforce Development

Section 166 of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) provides for employment and training activities to "promote the economic and social development of Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities in accordance with the goals and values of such communities," among other purposes. Section 174 of the WIA provides that the Secretary shall reserve not less than \$55 million for carrying out Section 166, but the current funding level is less than \$50 million. Sadly, after a steady rise in the number of participants served (from just over 23,000 in 2006 to over 39,000 in 2010), funding cuts in 2011 rolled back that progress, resulting in fewer than 35,500 served in 2012 – many of whom received only a bare minimum of services. In 2012, the unemployment rate for AI/AN people living on reservation lands was 22.8 percent. Unless addressed immediately by restored funding, the decrease in funding to WIA will have adverse impacts on long-term sustainable employment, economic growth, and community stability for generations to come, in addition to increasing government dependency. At the very least, funding for Section 166 programs must be restored to the \$55 million floor established in the statute.

Department of Health and Human Services - Protecting Resources for Children and Families

The HHS budget is the primary source of tribal funding for social services. Many tribes access HHS funding from to address challenges and service gaps in their communities in the important areas of early child hood education, child maltreatment, and basic needs like heat.

- Indian Head Start is regarded as a critically important and particularly successful federal program which targets the challenging circumstances faced by too many Native children. Indian Head Start promotes the school readiness of children birth to 5 by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development.

Head Start programs holistically address the education, health, family, and community needs of children in a manner akin to traditional Native learning styles, child rearing, and cultural practices and have proven to be very successful in Indian Country for promoting school readiness and healthy child development. Unfortunately, currently only about 16 percent of eligible Indian children are enrolled in Indian Head Start, and only about 188 of the 566 federally recognized tribes have funding for Indian Head Start programs. Nonetheless, Indian Head Start lost about \$12 million last year. Restoring money to this program will help ensure healthy child development in the short term and a stronger more accomplished workforce in the long term.

- The Child Care and Community Development Block Grant improves the availability, affordability and quality of child care for Indian Children and is the major funding source for tribal child care. Affordable tribal child care not only provides safe social and emotional environments for young children it also expands work opportunities and self-sufficiency for adults who have children. 259 Tribes and Tribal organizations (including 20 consortia), encompassing approximately 530 federally-recognized tribes are funded by this program. The FY13 sequester cut this program by \$122 million (\$2.5 million to tribes). Restoring this funding will provide safe places for young children and increase the number of working adults in Indian Country.
- Title IV-B Subpart 1-Child Welfare Services and Title IV-B Subpart 2-Promoting Safe and Stable Families (discretionary component) provide important flexible funding for child welfare services in tribal communities. These services form the foundation of all tribal child welfare programs. These funds support preventive interventions so that, whenever possible, children will not have to be removed from their homes and so that when remaining in the home is unsafe children are placed with family or in foster care and reunification services are available to encourage the return of children. These funds strengthen families, promote family stability and keep children in tribal communities safe, yet Child Welfare Services lost \$18 million last year. These children are the most vulnerable in Indian Country and it is for this reason that it is essential that these funds be restored.
- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program: LIHEAP keeps families safe and healthy by assisting them with energy costs. Due to geographic isolation many parts of Indian Country have higher than average heating costs. Furthermore, barriers to economic development create high unemployment rates in Indian country that make it difficult to afford to pay for the now rising costs of heat and power. For example, Alaska Native villages have recently experienced a substantial increase in energy costs, with fuel prices recently reaching \$9 per gallon. LIHEAP which was cut substantially prevents families from having to make the difficult choice between food and heat. Restoring these funds will ensure that thousands of Native families don't have to make this choice.

Department of Education – Funding our Future

- Impact Aid: A majority of Native students attend public schools. During the 2010-2011 school year, there were 378,000 AI/AN students in the U.S. public school system. During the same period, there were 49,152 students in Bureau of Indian Education Schools. Across the nation, federal dollars represented 12.3 percent of school revenue in FY10, on average. In most school districts, education is funded largely by state and local governments, with the federal government contributing between 10 to 20 percent. However, schools on Indian reservations and military bases are on or near tax-exempt land. Unable to raise funds from taxes, Indian reservation and military schools depend heavily on federal aid. In addition to funds for poor and disabled children, schools on federal land also receive Impact Aid, intended to make up for the lack of property-tax revenue. Nearly the entire top 25 districts nationally who are most reliant on federal funding are on or adjacent to Indian reservations, which is largely due to the funding received through Impact Aid. The over \$67 million in cuts to Impact Aid have directly affected the operation of 710 schools and the services provided to approximately 115,000 Native students during the 2012-2013 school year.

- Title VII (Indian Education Formula Grants): This grant funding is designed to supplement the regular school program and assist Native students so they have the opportunity to achieve the same educational standards and attain parity with their non-Native peers. In FY 2013, about \$8 million was cut from Indian Education Grants under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. These funds are to fulfill the trust relationship of the federal government to Native education and ensure local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, and postsecondary institutions can better serve Native children.

Nearly one in three American Indian and Alaska Native people—29.1 percent—lived below the federal poverty line, 11 of every 1,000 American Indian and Alaska Native children are abused or neglected, and the high school drop-out rate for AI/AN students is estimated at 14.3 percent, the second highest of any other group of students. For Native people, these statistics are not just a moral call to action; they also represent a serious legal failing of our federal government to honor the treaty obligations it made to Native people generations ago—obligations to provide basic services that ensure our well-being by promoting opportunity, safety, and education. If you have any additional questions, please contact Amber Ebarb or Colby Duren on our staff (aebarb@ncai.org, cduren@ncai.org, or by phone at 202-466-7767).

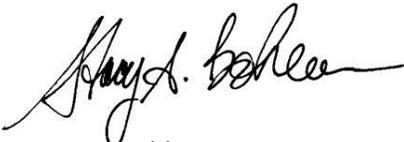
Sincerely,



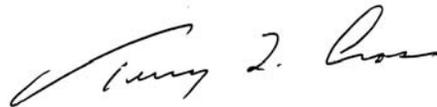
Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians



Ahniwake Rose
Executive Director
National Indian Education Association



Stacy A. Bohlen
Executive Director
National Indian Health Board



Terry Cross
Executive Director
National Indian Child Welfare Association