



National
Congress of
American
Indians



May 20, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary DeVos and Secretary Bernhardt:

On behalf of the undersigned American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) organizations, we write to follow up on our March 31, 2020, letter on the distribution of funds under H.R. 748, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In that letter, our organizations recommended that the Department of Education and the Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) immediately distribute funds and allow for maximum flexibility in use.

Under the CARES Act, the BIE received \$69 million for Tribal Colleges and Universities, BIE controlled schools, and tribally controlled schools funded by the agency. On April 15, 2020, the Department of Interior, Office of the Assistant Secretary, released an information sheet announcing that BIE and tribally controlled schools would receive \$46 million of this funding to address the costs of closing schools, transporting students home, and enhancing online learning.

In addition to these funds, the CARES Act established an Education Stabilization Fund within the Department of Education and appropriated \$153.75 million for BIE funded programs. Tribal listening sessions on fund distribution were scheduled for Friday, April 24, 2020, but were rescheduled to April 28 and 30th due to technical difficulties. Written comments were accepted until May 6, 2020.

To date, there have been no announcements by the BIE or by the Department of Education on how these funds will be distributed to BIE and tribally controlled schools.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge, we ask the BIE and Department of Education to provide a status update on these funds and we urge the immediate distribution of these funds to address the critical needs facing our Native students during this time. We look forward to working with your departments to support the expedient distribution of these funds to aid Native students who are experiencing diminished educational opportunities due to the pandemic and the delay in the distribution of congressional emergency relief funds.

Sincerely,
National Congress of American Indians
National Indian Education Association
United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

cc: The Honorable Roy Blunt, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Patty Murray, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Tom Cole, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Tom Udall, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Betty McCollum, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable David Joyce, U.S. House of Representatives
Ruth Ryder, Acting Director, Office of Indian Education, Department of Education
Tony Dearman, Director, Bureau of Indian Education, Department of Interior
Ron Lessard, Acting Director, White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska
Native Education