



National
Congress of
American
Indians



April 1, 2020

The Honorable Ben Carson, M.D.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th St SW
Washington, DC 20410

Re: Recommendations for the Rapid Disbursement of COVID-19 Funding for Native American Housing

Dear Secretary Carson:

On behalf of the undersigned American Indian and Alaska Native organizations, we write to request your urgent attention to matters delegated to you under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (“CARES”) Act. As an initial matter, we want to thank you for all your efforts during the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to ensure that U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs are being responsive to housing needs across the country. Additionally, we would like to thank you and your staff, including Public and Indian Housing Assistant Secretary Hunter Kurtz and Deputy Assistant Secretary Heidi Frechette and others, for their engagement with tribal housing programs across the country.

As part of the recently enacted third COVID-19 response bill, Congress has provided an additional \$300 million for Native American housing. We stand ready to assist you in ensuring that funding gets deployed in an expedited manner as Congress intends.

Congress included \$200 million of the housing funds to be deployed through the existing Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG), which recently finalized its Fiscal Year 2020 formula allocations provided through annual appropriations. We expect this additional funding can quickly and easily be provided to tribal nations through that same mechanism. Further, the release of funding should not be conditioned upon tribal programs first updating their Indian Housing Plans, but rather that those plans can be amended at any time after distribution of the funds, through existing processes.

Congress provided an additional \$100 million to be deployed through the Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG), with the bill stating that “the Secretary shall prioritize, without competition, allocations of these amounts for activities and projects designed to prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus.” Language in the bill also suggests the funding be distributed under the “imminent threat” component of the ICDBG program. We encourage HUD to issue guidance and timelines as soon as possible to ensure that tribal nations are aware of how these funds will be distributed and how they can access these funds for COVID-19 response and prevention in their communities. The imminent threat program already provides for tribal nations

to incur costs associated with emergency projects prior to full application approval, and we hope HUD utilizes this authority in a streamlined and expedited fashion for these tribal projects.

Finally, we encourage HUD to utilize any authority it has and any administrative funding it receives to expedite the hiring of any staff that the HUD Office of Native American Programs needs to complete the distribution and management of these funds.

Thank you for your consideration of the recommendations outlined in this letter. We look forward to working with you to ensure that Indian Country's concerns and priorities are comprehensively addressed, as we respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

Sincerely,



Kevin J. Allis
Chief Executive Officer
National Congress of American Indians



Anthony Walters
Executive Director
National American Indian Housing Council



W. Ron Allen
Tribal Chairman/CEO
Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe



Leonard Forsman
President
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

President of the Board, SGCETC