



June 12, 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 Secretaries DeVos and Bernhardt:

We write on behalf of our undersigned Tribal organizations to urge the immediate disbursement of funding for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and Tribally-Controlled Schools under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. It has now been well over two months since the CARES Act was signed into law. This letter follows two previous communications in which we urged the swift and timely distribution of these funds.

The CARES Act contained two funding provisions to support Indian Education Programs and Native students during the upheaval and uncertainty caused by the global pandemic. First, \$69 million was allocated to BIE for schools operated by the agency, Tribally-controlled schools, and Tribal Colleges and Universities. In mid-April, BIE announced that \$46 million of this total would be allocated to BIE and Tribally-controlled schools to support distance learning and the logistics of school closures. Following a nearly two-month silence, we have recently been informed that as of June 4<sup>th</sup>, these funds have now been authorized for release. However, despite reports that at least some Tribally-controlled schools have received notice of allocation, it seems as though the transfer of funds continues to be unduly burdensome and delayed. Further, there has been no public announcement regarding the methodology for distribution.

In addition, the CARES Act set aside \$153.75 million for BIE-funded programs in the Education Stabilization Fund administered by the Department of Education for further COVID-related expenses. Since Tribal listening sessions were held in late April, we are aware of no further action taken to issue this funding.

It has been three weeks since our organizations wrote to request a status update from your respective agencies on when Indian Country could expect the delivery of these funds. Now, it is clear that our education system will conclude the 2019-2020 school year without the emergency relief intended by Congress during the COVID-19 pandemic. This continued inaction exacerbates the educational disparities our communities face, in violation of federal trust and treaty obligations.

Our students represent the future of our Tribal Nations. It is truly unconscionable to deny them the resources they need to continue their education amidst a public health crisis. The Department of Education and BIE must disburse these funds without further delay. We look forward to hearing from you on your respective plans for distribution.

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