



# NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

## Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies

### Senate Committee on Appropriations

U.S. Senate

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## Written Testimony for Fiscal Year 2017

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The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is the intergovernmental body for American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments. NCAI is the oldest and largest national tribal organization in the United States that is dedicated to protecting the rights of tribal governments to achieve self-determination and self-sufficiency. For over sixty years tribal governments have come together as a representative Congress through NCAI to consider issues of critical importance to tribal governments and endorse consensus policy positions. NCAI appreciates the opportunity to offer the following testimony on tribal programs in the Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services.

### U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

NCAI supports investments in tribal health and well-being across the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) agencies.

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration: NCAI appreciates the funding increases made to Tribal Behavioral Health Grants in the FY 2016 appropriations bill. NCAI requests continued funding of at least \$30 million, which includes \$15 million in the Mental Health appropriation and \$15 million in the Substance Abuse Prevention appropriation. These funds are essential in the promotion of mental health and prevent substance activities for high-risk American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth and their families.

Administration for Community Living (ACL): Native American Nutrition and Supportive Services: NCAI recommends \$31 million for this program. This program provides nutrition and other direct supportive services to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian elders. These programs help to reduce the need for costly nursing home care by supporting adult day care, meal delivery and transportation.

Head Start: Head Start funds provide early education to over 24,000 Native children. This vital program combines education, health, and family services to model traditional Native education, which accounts for its success rate. NCAI recommends the Subcommittee to provide \$9.6 billion total funding for Head Start, which includes Indian Head Start. Head Start has been and continues to play an instrumental role in Native education.

### Administration for Children and Families

NCAI supports start-up funding for tribal IV-E programs and improving of tribal access to Promoting Safe and Stable Families.

*Start-up funding and increase match for tribal IV-E programs:* NCAI urges Congress to improve tribes' capacity to operate title IV-E programs by providing start-up funding and an increased match for tribal IV-E. The President's budget includes a proposal that allows Indian tribes, tribal organizations, or consortia that are approved to operate a title IV-E program to apply for start-up funding to assist with the implementation of the program requirements in title IV-E of the Social Security Act. A second proposal would amend title IV-E to develop the tribal child welfare workforce by increasing the match rate for tribal case work activities and increasing the Federal financial participation to 90 percent for training tribal caseworkers.

*Increasing Tribal Access to Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF):* NCAI supports an increase of \$20 million in the discretionary PSSF appropriation from the FY 2016 enacted level to improve tribal capacity to administer child welfare services. American Indian and Alaska Native children are disproportionately represented at two times their population in state child welfare systems nationally. Among individual state foster care systems they are overrepresented at as much as 10 times their population rate. NCAI urges Congress to help address the disproportionality affecting Native children by investing in tribal child welfare systems.

Many tribes lack infrastructure and stable funding. While tribes may directly administer title IV-E programs, many tribes still need to build their child welfare programs. With this increase, total funding reserved for formula grants for tribes will be \$31 million, including \$22 million discretionary and \$9 million mandatory.

*Tribal Court Improvement:* A \$2.75 million increase is proposed for this program to allow ACF to fund a total of 25 tribal court improvement grants. The expansion of the Tribal Court Improvement Program would continue to strengthen the tribal court's capacity to exercise jurisdiction in Indian Child Welfare Act cases and to adjudicate child welfare cases in tribal court.

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): Provide \$4.7 billion for LIHEAP, with \$51 million allocated to tribes and tribal organizations. The LIHEAP is intended to assure that low-income families will not be forced to choose between food and heat. With high unemployment and long-standing barriers to economic development, much of Indian Country cannot afford the rising costs of heat and power. Alaska Native villages are experiencing some of the highest costs for energy with fuel prices recently reaching \$7 per gallon. In FY 2011, LIHEAP was appropriated \$4.7 billion total, with \$51 million allocated to tribes and tribal organizations. Full funding is crucial to address the extreme need for heating assistance in Indian Country. Accordingly, funding for FY 2017 should be \$51 million for tribes.

### **U.S. Department of Education:**

*Title I Part A Local Education Agency Grants:* Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides critical financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high percentages of children from low-income families that ensure all children meet challenging state academic standards. Currently, there are over 600,000 Native students across the country with nearly 93 percent of those students attending public schools in rural and urban locations. A drastic increase in funding to counter annual inflation and sequestration, as well as to match the amount appropriated under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA), is necessary to meet

the needs of Native students and students from low-income families. NCAI recommends funding of \$25 billion for Title I, Part A.

*Impact Aid:* Impact Aid provides direct payments to public school districts as reimbursement for the loss of traditional property taxes due to a federal presence or activity, including the existence of an Indian reservation. With nearly 93 percent of Native students enrolled in public schools, Impact Aid provides essential funding for schools serving Native students. Funding for Impact Aid must not be less than this requested amount. Furthermore, Impact Aid should be converted to a forward-funded program to eliminate the need for cost transfers and other funding issues at a later date. NCAI requests the Subcommittee to provide \$2 billion in funding for Impact Aid, Title VII funding under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

#### Title VI-Indian Education:

*Grants to Local Education Agencies (Title VI, Part A):* Increases are needed as this critical 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. Title VI funds support early-childhood and family programs, academic enrichment programs, curriculum development, professional development, and culturally-related activities. These grants provide much needed resources to Native communities to invest in the success of their students. NCAI recommends funding of \$198 million for LEA grants.

*Native American and Alaska Native Language Immersion Schools and Programs (Title VI, Part A, Subpart 3):* Native American and Alaska Native Language Immersion Schools and Programs would strengthen tribal sovereignty, while protecting the cultural and linguistic heritage of Native students in education systems. In years past, funding for Title VI only reached 500,000 Native students leaving over 100,000 without supplementary academic and cultural programs in their schools. As Native students lag behind their non-Native peers in educational achievement, increased funding is necessary to address this substantial gap. NCAI urges the Subcommittee to fund immersion programs at \$6.6 million for FY 2017.

*Alaska Native Education Program (Title VI, Part C):* This essential program funds the development of curricula and education programs that address the unique educational needs of Alaska Native students, as well as the development and operation of student enrichment programs in science and mathematics. Other eligible activities include professional development for educators, activities carried out through Even Start programs and Head Start programs, family literacy services, and dropout prevention programs. NCAI recommends the Alaska Native Education Equity Assistance Program be funded at \$35 million for FY 2017.

*Native Hawaiian Education Program (Title VI, Part B):* Increases are needed as this critical grant program funds the development of curricula and education programs that address the unique needs of Native Hawaiian students to help bring equity to this Native population. The Native Hawaiian Education Program empowers innovative culturally appropriate programs to enhance the quality of education for Native Hawaiians. These programs strengthen the Native Hawaiian culture and improve educational attainment, both of which are correlated with positive economic outcomes. NCAI recommends funding of \$35 million for Native Hawaiian Education Program for FY 2017.

Tribal Colleges and Universities: Supporting Financially Disadvantaged Students: Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act, known as Aid for Institutional Development programs, support institutions with a large proportion of financially disadvantaged students and low cost-per-student expenditures. Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) clearly fit this definition. The nation's 37 TCUs serve Native and non-Native students in some of the most impoverished areas in the nation. Congress recognized the TCUs as emergent institutions, and, as such, authorized a separate section of Title III (Part A, Sec. 316) specifically to address their needs. Additionally, a separate section (Sec. 317) was created to address similar needs of Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian institutions. NCAI urges this Subcommittee to appropriate \$60 million (\$30 million in discretionary funding and \$30 million in mandatory funding) for Title III-A grants under the Higher Education Act for Tribal Colleges and Universities.

Tribally Controlled Post-Secondary Career and Technical Institutions: Section 117 of the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act authorizes funding for operations at tribally controlled postsecondary career and technical institutions. Vocational education/training programs are very expensive to conduct, but are vital to preparing a future workforce that will operate safely and efficiently contributing greatly to the global economy. Currently, two TCUs participate in this funding program: United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Navajo Technical College in Crownpoint, New Mexico. NCAI recommends \$10 million for tribally controlled postsecondary career and technical institutions program funds under the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act.

Native American-Serving, non-Tribal Institutions (Higher Education Act Title III-F): As the primary federal funding for non-tribal, Native-serving institutions of higher education, the current funding levels are insufficient. With nearly 100 institutions potentially qualifying as Native-serving, non-tribal institutions, this strains the small amount of available funding. Increasing the funding will provide the opportunity for more Native-serving institutions to better serve their students and increase graduation rates among Native students. NCAI urges the Subcommittee to fund \$10 million for non-tribal, Native-serving institutions of higher education.

In conclusion, NCAI appreciates the opportunity to share these recommendations with the Subcommittee. The needs in Indian Country are great and we thank this Subcommittee for working to honor the federal Indian trust responsibility.