[Tribal Nation]

[Tribal Nation Address]

[Tribal Nation Email Address]

[Tribal Nation Phone Number]

July [##], 2025

The Honorable [First Name] [Last Name]

[Address]

Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Communicate to Appropriators the Need to Protect Funding for Programs that Carry Out Trust and Treaty Obligations to Indian Country**

Dear [Representative / Senator] [Last Name]:

On behalf of the sovereign [Tribal Nation], we ask that you urge congressional appropriators to protect and expand federal funding for Tribal programs in Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills. Any reductions in funding for programs that deliver services or resources to Indian Country would violate the United States’ trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens and communities.

The federal government’s funding obligations for Tribal programs are not discretionary budget items subject to political negotiations and shifting priorities; they are legally binding obligations for which Tribal Nations paid-in-full with our lands and resources. Any attempt to reduce federal funding to Indian Country represents a breach of these legal obligations and undermines the government-to-government relationships between the United States and Tribal Nations.

For too long, Indian Country has operated in crisis due to grossly inadequate federal funding levels coupled with regular federal funding interruptions. These funding inadequacies and gaps threaten the lives and safety of our Tribal citizens and communities. For example, the Indian Health Service (IHS) receives funding at only a fraction of what is needed, leaving hospitals and clinics to operate on shoestring budgets, resulting in preventable deaths and suffering in our communities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) chronically underfunds essential services, including law enforcement, natural resources management, and basic infrastructure, threatening the day-to-day health and safety of our citizens. The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) struggles to provide sufficient educators, safe facilities, and consistent resources, creating subpar educational opportunities for our children that only feed into a cycle of poverty. These funding shortfalls are not merely budget constraints—they are a pattern of neglect and apathy towards Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens and communities.

Further, IHS, BIA, and BIE are not the only agencies critical to the delivery of funds and services in Indian Country. Delivery of trust and treaty obligations is complex and diffuse throughout the federal government, and every one of these dollars must be protected. Programs providing essential services to Indian Country are administered across federal agencies and their respective offices and bureaus, and the methods of service delivery vary. Sometimes, the federal government provides direct delivery of services to Tribal Nations and Tribal communities, and sometimes Tribal Nations are able to use federal funding to deliver governmental services to our own communities. In some circumstances, federal programs or funding are specifically allocated for Indian Country, and sometimes Indian Country secures funding made more widely available to other entities, in order to fill gaps in funding for essential services. Any federal funding delivered to Indian Country—including through Tribal organizations serving Tribal Nations and through other mechanisms—is provided in furtherance of the United States’ trust and treaty obligations and must be protected.

We call on Congress to honor its trust and treaty obligations by doing the following:

* **Maintain and increase—do *not* decrease—federal funding that flows to Indian Country.** Direct Tribal program funding, Tribal set-asides, and broader federal programs that Tribal Nations access to address chronic underfunding should be increased to address long-standing unmet obligations, or, at a minimum, current funding levels must be maintained. Every dollar spent in Indian Country represents a step forward by the United States in upholding the commitments it made to our Ancestors and toward fulfilling its trust and treaty obligations today.
* **Protect federal employee positions serving Tribal Nations.** Federal employees who administer Tribal programs, provide services, distribute federal funding, and provide technical assistance to Tribal Nations are critical to the vitality of our governments, economies, and communities and are necessary for delivery on trust and treaty obligations. The ongoing and persistent cuts to federal staff directly translate to reduced services, slowed delivery of funding, and compromised healthcare, public safety, and education for our communities, and further erode the government-to-government relationships between the United States and Tribal Nations.
* **Recognize that Tribal funding is compensation owed.** Federal appropriations serving Indian Country are neither aid nor charity; instead, these funds are an obligation purposefully and willingly taken on by the United States in exchange for Tribal Nations’ land and resources. The United States’ trust and treaty obligations arise from the cession of hundreds of millions of acres of our ancestral lands and the promises made in exchange for peace and cooperation.

The persistent underfunding of Indian Country has created a debt that grows larger each year and has powerful and destructive impacts on our Tribal citizens and within our communities. This underfunding perpetuates cycles of poverty, limits economic development, stifles our exercise of sovereign governance, and denies our people the services that other American citizens enjoy and take for granted. Our Tribal Nations have the inherent right to govern ourselves and our people, yet we cannot exercise these rights fully when the federal government fails to meet its basic obligations.

We call upon Congress to honor its sacred trust and treaty obligations and fulfill its constitutionally recognized duties to Tribal Nations. In furtherance of this goal, we ask that you communicate to congressional appropriators that protecting federal funding for Tribal programs is your priority.

Respectfully,

[Tribal Nation / Tribal Nation Leadership]