



September 12, 2025

The Honorable Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20210  
via email: [chavezderemer.lori.m@dol.gov](mailto:chavezderemer.lori.m@dol.gov)

**RE: Preserving and Funding the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)  
Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs**

Dear Secretary Chavez-DeRemer:

On behalf of the undersigned Tribal organization members of the Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty (CTS), we write to request that the Administration and Department of Labor (DOL) preserve the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs as a stand-alone program within DOL and ensure that Section 166 of WIOA is adequately funded in the FY 2026 Appropriations process. Section 166 of WIOA is important both on its own and as an integral part of Public Law 102-477, as amended (PL 477 Program)—which is designed to remove bureaucratic red tape, increase federal funding efficiency, and return control to local communities, in alignment with the Administration’s policy priorities.

**Section 166 of WIOA advances delivery on trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations, Tribal citizens, and Tribal communities.**

Section 166 of WIOA is dedicated to supporting employment and training activities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian individuals to “develop more fully the academic, occupational, and literacy skills of such individuals; make [them] more competitive in the workforce and [] equip them with the entrepreneurial skills necessary for successful self-employment; and promote the economic and social development of Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities *in accordance with the goals and values of such communities.*”<sup>1</sup> Congress’s creation of Section 166 as a stand-alone DOL program within WIOA constituted a powerful and necessary affirmation of the federal government’s unique trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations, Tribal citizens, and Tribal communities.

**Section 166 of WIOA has fostered positive change in Native communities and continues to advance Administration goals, including with respect to workforce development and economic development.**

In the 11 years since WIOA’s passage, the more than 160 Tribal Nation governments and Tribal organizations—including Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs)—that have received Section 166 funding have generated a proven track record of positive education and employment outcomes

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<sup>1</sup> 29 USC § 3221 (available at: [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/dinap/pdfs/WIOA\\_Subtitle\\_D\\_Sec\\_166.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/dinap/pdfs/WIOA_Subtitle_D_Sec_166.pdf)).

for the Native people they serve. For example, in 2024, grantees reported a 69.5% employment rate among all Native adults one year after their exit from the WIOA program.

**Section 166 of WIOA is an integral part of the PL 477 Program, which has proven successful in removing bureaucratic red tape, increasing federal funding efficiency, and returning control to local communities, in alignment with the Administration’s goals.**

Additionally, nearly half of the Tribal Nation government and Tribal organization grantees integrate WIOA Section 166 dollars as core funding in the self-sufficiency PL 477 plans they operate under the PL 477 Program, and those Section 166 dollars provide a large percentage of the PL 477 funding now incorporated into existing PL 477 plans.

The highly successful 477 Program—expanded and made permanent by President Trump in 2017—enables Tribal Nations and inter-Tribal consortia to merge federal funds from across 12 federal agencies and various funding streams into a single, Tribally designed, comprehensive, and streamlined Tribal program designed to support the self-sufficiency of individual Tribal community members. The PL 477 Program allows Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations to consolidate funding streams, reallocate funding across the functions and services integrated into the Tribally designed PL 477 plan to meet current community needs, obtain waivers of statutory or regulatory barriers that prevent streamlining, produce just one comprehensive federal report, and more. This is what putting decision-making into local government hands to help community members become self-sufficient looks like in action.

The PL 477 Program has produced remarkable outcomes, especially when paired with WIOA Section 166. For example, participants in Tribally designed 477 plans report a total gain of \$9.45 per hour in unsubsidized employment, and 94% of them complete the training and employment goals identified in their PL 477-based Individual Self-Sufficiency Plans. These outcomes are particularly significant given the unique challenges facing Tribal communities, including geographic isolation, limited local employment opportunities, and historical underinvestment in education and infrastructure.

**Section 166 of WIOA requires adequate funding to continue advancing Tribal self-governance, deliver on trust and treaty obligations, and positively impact Indian Country.**

Despite the significant and proven benefits of WIOA Section 166, it is in grave danger in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Appropriations process. Currently, the President’s FY 2026 Budget Request proposes to eliminate the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs altogether “and replace them with the Make America Skilled Again (MASA) grant program” which “will consolidate multiple standalone programs into a single program that can serve a range of job seekers, including Indians and Native Americans.”<sup>2</sup> In addition to eliminating the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs, if this proposal were to take effect, it would also render DOL’s statutory Native American Employment and Training Council effectively meaningless, stifling Indian Country’s primary voice in informing federal workforce development and policy funding.

Eliminating the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs would not only violate the federal government’s trust and treaty obligations and undermine decades of successful workforce development, but it would also force Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations to compete on an unlevel playing field with non-Native grantees for resources rather than receiving the

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<sup>2</sup> FY 2026 Congressional Budget Justification Employment and Training Administration: Training and Employment Services, pp. 29-33 (available at: <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2026/CBJ-2026-V1-03.pdf>).

dedicated support they are owed. It would also hinder the success of the PL 477 Program. Given WIOA Section 166 is a critical driver of self-determined workforce and economic development and community member self-sufficiency across Indian Country, it must be preserved *and* amply funded.

Therefore, we urge the Administration and Congress to not only preserve and fund WIOA Section 166, but to support a marked *increase* in that funding to meet the obligations to Indian Country and grow WIOA Section 166's success. Since the 1970s, Section 166 and its predecessor programs have been chronically underfunded and have failed to keep pace with the rapidly growing Native population in need of these services as well as the rising costs of education, training, and related services. Since its funding peak of \$225 million in 1979, Section 166 has experienced a precipitous funding decline to roughly \$75 million annually. Dedicated funding for WIOA Section 166 grantees should be increased substantially commensurate with the rapid growth of the Native population, the identified service needs of the eligible Native population, and inflation. This funding should also be converted to forward funding to avoid ongoing issues with DOL providing money to grantees in a timely fashion.

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Thank you for your consideration of this critical request. We welcome the opportunity to provide additional information or facilitate meetings with Tribal leaders and grantee representatives to discuss the WIOA Section 166 Indian and Native American Programs further.

Sincerely,

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI)  
Alaska Native Women's Resource Center (AKNWRC)  
Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association (GPTCA)  
Great Plains Tribal Leaders' Health Board (GPTLHB)  
Indian Gaming Association (IGA)  
National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED)  
National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)  
National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)  
National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC)  
Seattle Indian Health Board (SIHB)  
United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF)

CC: Keith Sonderling, Deputy Secretary, Department of Labor  
Laura Dawkins, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Department of Labor  
Lori Frazier Bearden, Acting Assistant Secretary, Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor  
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Kimberly Vitelli, Administrator, Office of Workforce Investment, Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor  
Alex Meyer, Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs  
Russell Vought, Director, Office of Management and Budget