[Date]

The Honorable [Name]

[Washington DC Office Address]

***RE:* Indian Programs Advance Appropriations Act of 2019**

Dear Senator [Name]:

On behalf of the [Tribe], I strongly urge you to co-sponsor S. 229, the Indian Programs Advance Appropriations Act, which would enact advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service (IHS) and other agencies serving Indian Country. This legislation would provide timely and predictable funding to administer health programs and services to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

Chronic late funding to IHS subjected the agency to a funding lapse during the partial government shutdown of 2018-19. Because of this lapse in funding, IHS employees were furloughed or worked without pay and many Tribes had to curtail health services or make cuts in other areas to keep critically needed facilities open and staffed. These irresponsible decisions by policymakers only put our people’s lives at risk. [If your Tribe was harmed by the shutdown, please include how in this letter.]

Since Fiscal Year 1998, appropriated funds for medical services and facilities through IHS have only been provided before the commencement of the new fiscal year once. Late funding has resulted in significant challenges to Tribal and IHS programs in the areas of budgeting, recruitment and retention, provision of services, and facility maintenance and construction efforts, among other areas. Unreliable funding distributions create unnecessary work and additional expenses. The result is that Tribal health programs are left to make long-term decisions with only short-term money guaranteed. Often programs must determine whether and how they can enter into contracts with outside vendors and suppliers, plan programmatic activities, or maintain current personnel.

Indian Country deserves better. Funding for the Indian health system is a result of Treaties and other legal obligations made by the federal government with Indian Country and should not be held hostage each year to unrelated political battles. Adopting an advance appropriations allows Tribal and IHS facilities to plan fiscally with more efficiency and certainty.

Healthcare services directly administered by the federal government, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), are funded by advance appropriations to minimize the impact of late and, at times, inadequate budgets. The decision of Congress to enact advance appropriations for the VA medical program provides a compelling argument for the effectiveness of advance funding a federally administered health program, which could easily be applied to the IHS. Beyond the efficiency inherent to advance appropriations, providing timely and predictable funding helps ensure the federal government’s Trust responsibility if carried out.

On behalf of [Tribe or Tribal organization], I strongly urge you to support this necessary legislation. Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or if additional information can be provided.

Sincerely,

[Xxx, Yyy]