INSERT TRIBE/TRIBAL ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS

The Honorable Richard Shelby
United States Senate
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby,

On behalf of INSERT TRIBE/TRIBAL ORGANIZATION I write to strongly request that you prioritize passage of the FY 2020 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, which includes funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS), the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Bureau of Indian Education, among other important Indian agencies and programs. Put simply, timely passage of this bill funding health care services for Indian Country is a matter of life and death.

For far too long, the IHS has been disproportionately impacted by destabilizing government shutdowns and continuing resolutions that create significant challenges in the delivery of quality health services. In fact, because Congress failed to pass the FY 2019 Interior Appropriations bill on time last year, the IHS was the only federal health care entity to be impacted by the 35-day government shutdown. Other federal health care programs were not impacted by the shutdown because Congress has authorized advance appropriations for the Veterans Health Administration for nearly a decade, and because Congress had already passed the appropriations bill funding Tricare. Unfortunately, health care in Indian Country was treated as an afterthought. INSERT INFO ABOUT SHUTDOWN IMPACTS IN YOUR TRIBE. Reliance on continuing resolutions and the constant risk of government shutdowns make it exceedingly difficult for IHS, Tribal, and urban Indian health systems to recruit and retain quality providers, upgrade and maintain health facilities, expand the availability of services, and raise the health status of all American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Peoples.

Congress established the IHS in partial fulfillment of the federal trust and treaty obligations for health care to all federally-recognized Tribal Nations and AI/AN Peoples. Yet this promise has never been fully realized, with appropriations for IHS historically falling far below the level of need. For instance, FY 2017 per capita medical expenditures within the Indian health system amounted to just $4,078, compared to over $9,700 in national health spending. According to the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup, the current FY 2019 IHS budget of roughly $5.8 billion represents just 15% of total need to fully fund IHS services and facilities.

Chronic underfunding of the Indian health system is one of the primary factors contributing to the lower life expectancy, higher health disparities, and lower health outcomes of AI/ANs nationwide. There is no doubt that government shutdowns and continuing resolutions exacerbate issues around lack of funding for IHS. It is imperative that Congress work to enact IHS appropriations on time. INSERT TRIBE/TRIBAL ORG NAME would like to thank you for your leadership and stands ready to work with your office and Subcommittee Chairwoman Murkowski to ensure that Tribal funding priorities for IHS are advanced, and that the full FY 2020 Interior budget is passed before September 30.

Should you have any questions, please contact INSERT NAME

Sincerely,

INSERT TRIBE/TRIBAL ORGANIZATION