**[Tribe’s Letterhead]**

 Resolution \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE: Support for Dental Therapy as a Solution to the [TRIBE’S] Oral Health Challenges**

**WHEREAS**, [TRIBE] is a federally recognized Tribe, has a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with a duly elected government; and

**WHEREAS**, There is a present high unmet need for dental care among many Americans, particularly within the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) population, due in part to the lack of enough dentists available to serve Tribal reservations and the off-reservation AI/AN populations; and

**WHEREAS**, American Indians and Alaska Natives have a higher prevalence of dental caries and untreated tooth decay in all age groups compared to the general United States population, with many Native children experiencing dental caries before the age of two; and

**WHEREAS**, Poor oral health issues persist disproportionately for the AI/AN population such as:

* + - Over eighty percent of AI/AN children aged 2-4 years have dental caries;
		- Eight out of 10 (83%) AI/AN children between 6-9 years of age had a history of decay in their primary or permanent teeth, compared to 45% of children in the general U.S. population
		- Almost half of 6-9 year-old AI/AN children (47%) had untreated decay. This compares to 17% of 6-9 year-old children in the general U.S. population
		- Despite a trend toward a reduction in tooth loss in the U.S. population, older data indicate 25 percent of AI/AN people aged 35 to 44 years have fewer than 20 natural teeth;
		- Among all persons aged 55 years and older, nearly 75 percent have fewer than 20 natural teeth;
		- Fifty-nine percent of AI/AN adults have periodontal (gum) disease;
		- Seventy-eight percent AI/AN adults 35-44 years and 98 percent of elders (55 or older) have at least one tooth removed because of decay, trauma, or gum disease; and

**WHEREAS,** These disparities can be attributed to a lack of enough dental health professionals in the Indian health system in which Indian Health Service (IHS) dental providers have a patient load of 2,800 patients per provider, while general population providers have approximately 1,500 patients per provider and the IHS experiences a very high dental provider vacancy rate, with estimates that 26 percent of the dental positions within the IHS are vacant, which contributes to the lack of access to dental health services; and

**WHEREAS,** In treaties, health care was guaranteed by the federal government in perpetuity in exchange for Tribal land and peace; and

**WHEREAS,** Poor dental care is often a life sentence to poverty, as it is accompanied with a decline in self-confidence and often a loss of academic and economic opportunities due to social perceptions of poor dental hygiene, contributing to cyclical generational impoverishment in Indian Country; and

**WHEREAS,** Dental Therapists have been in existence in Alaska Native communities since 2004 and thoroughly evaluated for safety, quality, and appropriate scope of practice with the Alaska Native patient population in collaboration with the IHS; and

**WHEREAS,** Dental Therapists work as part of the dental team under the supervision of dentists and have received high results and accolades from patients, health care professionals, and community leaders in the U.S. and in over 50 other countries; and

**WHEREAS,** Although IHS, which fulfills the treaty obligation to provide health services to Tribes, is a federal agency, current federal law states that IHS can only utilize dental therapists working under the Community Health Aid Program (CHAP) if a state legislature agrees; and

**WHEREAS,** [STATE] passing legislation to allow for the hiring of Dental Health Aide Therapists would permit federal U.S. Indian Health Service funding to be used by Tribes to utilize Dental Therapists as part of the dental team; and

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED,** that the [TRIBE] supports legislation authorizing Dental Therapists in [STATE] in order to empower Tribes and the Indian Health Service to provide desperately needed dental care to our communities.