LOGO

DATE

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_\_

Senate Office Building \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Washington, DC 20510

***RE*: Advance Appropriations for Indian Programs**

Dear\_\_\_\_\_,

On behalf of INSERT TRIBE, **I strongly urge you to support S.229 – *Indian Programs Advance Appropriations Act*** and **S.2541 – *Indian Health Service Advance Appropriations Act of 2019***. Authorizing advance appropriations is consistent with the federal trust responsibility for health services for all American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Peoples, and would ensure that Tribes like INSERT TRIBE are protected from the destabilizing impact of government shutdowns and endless use of continuing resolutions (CRs). It would also further establish parity between IHS and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which Congress authorized to receive advance appropriations nearly a decade ago.[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition, INSERT TRIBE **strongly requests your support in including advance appropriations authority for IHS and BIA in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Budget Resolution and every year thereafter**.

Congress has continuously enacted legislation reaffirming the federal trust responsibility and direct government-to-government relationship between Tribes and the United States. During permanent reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act in 2010, Congress declared that, “…*it is the policy of this Nation, in fulfillment of its special trust responsibilities and legal obligations to Indians . . . to ensure the highest possible health status for Indians and urban Indians and to provide all resources necessary to effect that policy*.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Despite these promises, Congress has yet to fully fund IHS at the level of need. For instance, according to the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup, per capita medical expenditures within IHS were $4,078 in FY 2017, compared with $9,726 in national spending that same year.[[3]](#footnote-3) As a direct result of the chronic underfunding of IHS, quality health services remain inaccessible across many Tribal communities. Chronic and pervasive health staffing shortages – for everything from physicians to nurses to behavioral health practitioners – stubbornly persist across Indian Country, with 1,550 healthcare professional vacancies documented as of 2016. INSERT INFO ABOUT IMPACT OF UNDERFUNDING ON YOUR TRIBE.

Unfortunately, the challenges do not end with chronic underfunding. The most recent 35 day partial government shutdown disproportionately impacted our Tribe and all of Indian Country. Tribes nationwide reported rationed care, reduced services, loss of physicians and other provider types, and some facilities were forced to close altogether. INSERT INFO ABOUT SHUTDOWN IMPACTS. The shutdown destabilized Native health delivery and health care provider access; as well as Tribal governments, families, children, and individuals. In fact, IHS was the only federal healthcare entity to be impacted by the shutdown, because Congress already authorized advance appropriations for the VHA a decade ago. When you compound the impact of chronic underfunding, endless use of CRs, and continued threats of government shutdowns, the inevitable result are the chronic and pervasive health disparities across Indian Country.

Our Tribe and Native Peoples across Indian Country deserve better. Our communities prepaid for health services under the agreements codified in the over 300 Treaties signed between sovereign Tribal Nations and the United States. Not only would advance appropriations insulate our Tribe and the entire Indian health system from devastating government shutdowns, it would provide the guarantee of funding necessary to allow us to engage in better long-term planning, increase recruitment and retention of providers, and preserve continuity of care. Providing timely and predictable funding is integral towards honoring the federal trust responsibility.

On behalf of INSERT TRIBE, **I strongly urge you to support S.229 and S.2541, and to include advance appropriations authority for IHS and BIA in subsequent year’s budget resolutions**. We stand ready to work with you and the full Congress in a bipartisan manner to move these legislative priorities forward. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or to request further information.

Sincerely,

INSERT NAME AND SIGNATURE

1. *See* H.R. 1016, Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 25 U.S.C. § 1602 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup’s Recommendations on the Indian Health Service Fiscal Year 2021 Budget. Available at <https://www.nihb.org/docs/04242019/307871_NIHB%20IHS%20Budget%20Book_WEB.PDF> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)