

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2019

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

As strong supporters of this nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), we thank you for your past commitment to these important institutions. We request that you build on the progress we have made over the past few years by providing strong funding for institutional operations and technical assistance under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act [25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.] for the 31 TCUs funded under Titles I, II, and V of the Act. Strong funding would allow the institutions to continue offering culturally grounded, high quality postsecondary education opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives in some of the poorest and most geographically-isolated regions of the country.

Tribal Colleges and Universities not only provide postsecondary education and workforce training opportunities, but they serve as public cultural and community centers and as primary employers for their communities. TCU students are often older than the traditional college student, including single heads of households that are seeking to provide a better future for their families. TCUs offer their students a chance to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workforce while continuing to attend to their family and community responsibilities.

Funding for the basic institutional operations of the tribally chartered institutions funded under Title I of the Act is enrollment driven, based on a per Indian student allocation, known as the Indian Student Count (ISC). For the purposes of allotting these funds, only those students who are enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe or the biological child of a tribal member may be counted. Unlike other public higher education institutions, because TCUs are located on federal trust lands, states have no obligation to fund these institutions. Most states, in fact, do not provide any funding for a TCU's operating budget for the non-Indian state-resident students that account for approximately 15 percent of overall TCU enrollments. Consequently, federal support is critically important as the primary means to fund institutional operating budgets and their unique and growing technical assistance needs.

In the 40 years since the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act was enacted, the number of TCUs has increased fivefold and full-time Indian student TCU enrollments have increased by more than 300 percent—including students from more than 230 federally recognized tribes at more than 75 locations, in 16 states. Despite their impressive

growth, TCUs remain underfunded, causing persistent issues for recruiting and retaining qualified faculty and staff, and maintaining accreditation.

Support for TCU institutional operating budgets has yet to reach the authorized level, nor has it kept up with inflation. For the current academic year, the Title I funded institutions received \$7,285 per Indian student towards operations, yet are authorized to receive \$8,000 per Indian student.

Funding challenges can prevent these institutions from having the necessary resources to enhance their programs in response to the changing demands of 21st Century employers and industries. Technical assistance funds – appropriated at the same level since FY 2006 – remain critically important to effectively address the unique and growing technical assistance issues across all tribal colleges and therefore, should also be supported through adequate funding.

This year, the Senate unanimously adopted a bipartisan resolution designating the week beginning February 4, 2019, as "National Tribal Colleges and Universities Week" recognizing the importance of these vital institutions. Every day, we witness the extraordinary differences TCUs make to improve the lives of tribal and non-tribal students and families in their communities. These institutions are positive agents of change and the key to a brighter future for Indian country. They have proven to be a solid investment of federal dollars and deserve our strong support.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support of TCUs, and we look forward to working with you to continue this critical investment in tribal higher education. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator




Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator


Dan Sullivan
United States Senator

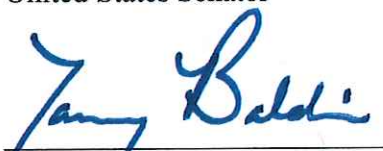

Jon Tester
United States Senator


Brian Schatz
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator


Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

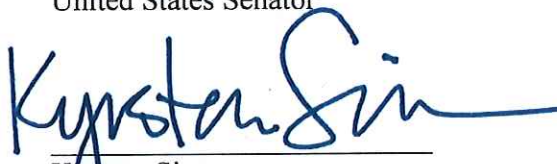

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator


Mazie Hirono
United States Senator


Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator