

August 11, 2025

The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Support for "The Native Children's Commission Implementation Act 2025" Legislative Package

Dear Senator Murkowski,

My name is Tina Woods, I am a clinical-community psychologist, and Chief Clinical Officer at Cook Inlet Tribal Council. You have my full support and gratitude for addressing the needs of Alaska Native/American Indian (AN/AI) children, families and communities.

This legislative package would support tribal self-governance and self-determination, providing Tribes the right to develop healing models that work for their respective communities. **Authorizing Tribes to receive direct funding to carry out services will assist with maximizing resources and benefits in a timely and culturally responsive manner for AN/AI people.**

Tribes are positioned with jurisdiction and authority to **develop centralized registration efficiencies that include eligibility screenings** which could be life changing for children and their families. Likewise, **culturally responsive case management** is key for ensuring a **no wrong door approach while weaving together the resources** available within a Tribal

organization such as social services, temporary and long-term benefits as well as behavioral health needs.

Providing a holistic model of care and robust wrap-around services decreases barriers and increases access to services for our people including **physiological needs like food and shelter** (e.g., Sec.602.Self-determination for SNAP, Sec.701.Pilot Program for Housing Assistance for Homeless Native Americans and Alaska Natives), and **safety needs such as prevention from physical & emotional abuse, violence, and delinquency among our youth which have significant impact on overall wellbeing of children and their families** (e.g., Sec.104. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act amendments, Sec.201.Tribal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice, Sec.203.Alaska Native Victim Services Fund at the Denali Commission, Sec.204.Alaska Native and American Indian family violence, prevention, services, and treatment, Sec.402.Set-aside of maternal and child health services block grant for Indian Tribes, Sec.404.Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Tribal Technical Advisory Committee, Sec. 406. Community Mental Health Services Grants for Indian Tribes and Tribal Organizations, and Sec. 407. Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Grants for Indian Tribes and Tribal Organizations).

As elders and Native leaders often mention, *“we have the solutions to our needs”*, a Tribal organization can expedite applications and timelier access towards wellness. **Our AN/AI people have the answers; and if given the resources and flexibility, Tribes can care for children and their families in a culturally responsive effective manner that moves us closer to transformational healing versus symptom reduction.**

When Tribal organizations give people a voice, it empowers individuals to be part of the solution in reaching their full potential. For instance, at Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC), we demonstrate holistic wellness through guiding principles identified by AN/AI people known as the Five Factors including, 1) *financial stability*, 2) *relationships*, 3) *healthy lifestyles*, 4) *education & training*, and 5) *cultural & spiritual wellness*. **CITCs Five Factors is the epitome of what Tribes can do when given a voice including departmental collaboration, cooperation, and breaking down silos** engaging AN/AI people to self-define goals towards wellness.

Particularly, in this proposal, **Title IV – Improving the Physical and Behavioral Health of Native Children**, Sec. 408. Self-Governance for Behavioral Health Program for Indian Tribes acknowledges the need for Tribes to 638 contract federal programs and provide services with **flexibility outside of “billing spaces” to support programs in Tribal communities**. This effort truly supports self-governance and self-determination around Tribes being able to develop healing opportunities that work for their communities. Healing holistically includes a “no wrong door approach” and addresses the whole person including areas such

as violence, food security, addiction, homelessness and other related matters that a person may identify as one of their five factors towards wellness.

As Tribes, we can provide care that is centered in 'culture as medicine' while weaving together with evidence-based services. This proposal opens doors to Tribes that want to expand Behavioral Health services for their people and not only increasing access to care but care that is culturally responsive. While the billing model and generating revenue for services is an important tool for sustainability, **Tribes would benefit from additional resources to build services that are culturally responsive and effective (allowing Tribes to self-govern).**

AN/AI people have been requesting autonomy for decades to heal our people through culturally responsive methods without the excessive regulatory expectations that often create barriers. While billable services offer sustainability, the rigorous regulatory framework burns out staff, making it difficult to recruit and sustain a healthy workforce due to the excessive demands on top of the emotional labor and vicarious trauma. **If given the funding directly, Tribes can integrate services with Behavioral Health and Social Services fully leveraging the whole system by combining resources versus the fragmented systems of care due to funding sources and regulations that break down holistic care options.**

Standards for billing services skew our ability to practice through a healing centered lens, whereas our current system burns out providers due to administrative burdens. The billing model is not the only option for healing our people. The demands with unnatural processes for healing people, pre-authorizations, and **multiple timeline expectations for documentation skews the natural process for meeting people where they are at.** Tribes can offer a holistic approach with wrap around services, reducing barriers, breaking down silos, increasing hope and success of individuals, families and communities. **A comprehensive system prevents AN/AI people from having to retell their story repeatedly to different agencies.** AN/AI people comprise disproportionate experiences with past trauma and often long-lasting effects that can shape a person's life with difficulty keeping a job, caring for children, and having relationships with others. Trauma can affect the development of our children biologically, psychologically and socially in their development. **All aspects of a human being's wellness are interconnected.** This proposal can have a profound impact on how we heal our children, families and communities in a holistic manner.

Furthermore, if Tribes are given the ability to self-govern, they can provide holistic care on the continuum of services including prevention, intervention and postvention. Also, **through culturally responsive Tribal case management wrap-around services, Tribes have the ability to comprehensively provide services through a centralized process of screening 'above and beyond' for eligibility regarding Title I—Child Welfare matters, Title II—Justice for Children, Youth and Families, Title VI—Improving Nutrition Programs for Native Children, Youth, and Families, and Title VII – Addressing Homelessness in Native Communities.**

A comprehensive and holistic approach to wellness for our children, families and communities is promising. While many of these funding sources have jurisdictional boundaries; **these resources intersect when applied into practice of holistic wellness.** If given autonomy, Tribes can combine resources producing transformational healing. Thank you for this work and dedication towards healing our Native children, families and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tina Woods', with a stylized, flowing script.

Tina Woods
Chief Clinical Officer
Cook Inlet Tribal Council