

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 18, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave SW  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

As the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and Senators who represent a significant number of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, we write to request that you continue to fund the Fiscal Year 2025 discretionary awards and any continuations for the following grant programs under Title III Part A of the Higher Education Act: Strengthening Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions (ANNHSI) and Strengthening Native American Serving Non-Tribal Institutions (NASNTI).

ANNHSI and NASNTI are statutory grant programs aimed at supporting higher education institutions that have a demonstrated commitment to serving Native American students. The funding authorized and appropriated for the ANNHSI and NASNTI programs helps strengthen institutional capacity to enhance the educational experience for *all* enrolled students. Reprogramming the funding for ANNHSIs and NASNTIs will pull an estimated \$36.1 million annually away from colleges and universities in Alaska, Hawai‘i, and the rest of the United States, including dollars that are part of ongoing grants – projects, programs, and services that are already in motion and that are serving currently enrolled students.

Notably, 90 percent of Native students enroll in traditional public and private colleges, including NASNTIs and ANNHSIs.<sup>1</sup> These institutions are statutorily authorized to receive federal support from the Department to strengthen their capacity to serve American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students,<sup>2</sup> and rely on this federal support to adequately serve enrolled students.<sup>3</sup> The Department’s decision to reprogram this critical source of funding for these colleges jeopardizes not just their continued existence, but also undermines the federal government’s trust and treaty obligations to provide Native students an education.

To be clear, these grants do not impose racial quotas or restrict admissions based on race, but support institutions that deliver on the federal trust responsibility to provide an education for

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<sup>1</sup> Am. Indian Coll. Fund, Inst. for Higher Educ. Policy & Brookings Inst., *Report on Native Higher Education Success Strategies: Strengthening Policies, Respecting Tribal Sovereignty, and Leveraging Data to Address the Decline in Native American Higher Education Enrollment—Findings from the 2024 Native Higher Education Policy Convening* (Jan. 2025), [https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2501\\_AI\\_NHEP\\_Report\\_FA3-Digital-Singles.pdf](https://www.ihep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2501_AI_NHEP_Report_FA3-Digital-Singles.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See 20 U.S.C. § 1059c; 20 U.S.C. § 1059d; 20 U.S.C. § 1059f.

<sup>3</sup> [8 key facts journalists should know about minority-serving institutions](#)

American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians because of their unique legal status and political relationship with the United States.<sup>4</sup> Agencies have clarified<sup>5</sup> that programs that serve American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians do not constitute Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) activities prohibited by President Trump's executive orders.<sup>6</sup> This is consistent with President Trump's first term and prior support for Indian Tribes and the Native Hawaiian Community and commitment to uphold the federal trust responsibility.

We are particularly concerned that these actions you are taking to reprogram funding for these grant programs conflict with the statements and commitments you made to Senator Murkowski as recently as April in your letter response (See attached). In that letter response, you acknowledged the federal government's trust responsibility to Native Americans. Further, you committed that ED would "continue[] to deliver on all statutory grant programs that support American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students and is identifying ways to deliver support effectively, expeditiously, and efficiently."

Additionally, the decision to withhold this funding runs contrary to the President's and your focus on increasing access to career and technical education. At each campus that receives ANNHSI and NASNTI funding, these dollars have been used to provide in-person and online certificate and degree programs that meet the needs of the students, employers, and communities in the region. These campuses provide students of all backgrounds opportunities to learn, gain certification, and fill employment gaps in high-demand industries in their home communities. ANNHSI and NASNTI campuses also partner with high schools to offer dual enrollment opportunities, allowing interested students to gain occupational endorsement certificates and enter the workforce directly after high school.

Your concerns about discrimination and race-based quotas are not applicable to ANNHSI and NASNTI institutions. As noted, these funds build institutions' capacity to serve students from both Native and non-Native backgrounds and contribute to the fulfillment of the federal government's trust responsibility to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. As such, we again urge you to reverse the decision to reprogram Title III funding for ANNHSI and NASNTI institutions and to release these funds, as appropriated by Congress, so that the work these schools do to support the trust responsibility, as well as the next generation of leaders as part of our nation's bright future, can continue.

Sincerely,

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<sup>4</sup> See, e.g. 20 U.S.C. § 7513; 25 U.S.C. §§ 2000, 2501; Exec. Order No. 13592, 76 Fed. Reg. 76603 (2011); American Indian and Alaska Native Education, Exec. Order No. 13096, 63 Fed. Reg. 42681 (1998); see also 20 U.S.C. § 7701; Tribal Colleges and Universities, Exec. Order No. 13270, 67 Fed. Reg. 45288 (2002); American Indian and Alaska Native Education, Exec. Order No. 13336, 69 Fed. Reg. 25295 (2004); see also 1 Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law § 23.01 (2024).

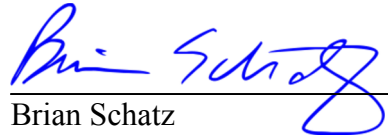
<sup>5</sup> Dept. of Interior, SO 3416—Ending DEI Programs and Gender Ideology Extremism (2025), <https://www.doi.gov/document-library/secretary-order/so-3416-ending-dei-programs-and-gender-ideology-extremism>

<sup>6</sup> Trump, Exec. Order No. 14151, "Ending DEI Programs and Gender Ideology Extremism," Jan. 20 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing/>



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Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator  
Chairman, Committee on  
Indian Affairs



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Brian Schatz  
United States Senator  
Vice Chairman, Committee  
on Indian Affairs



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Dan Sullivan  
United States Senator



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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



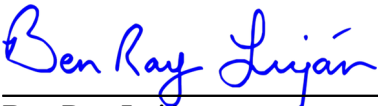
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Thom Tillis  
United States Senator



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Ruben Gallego  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



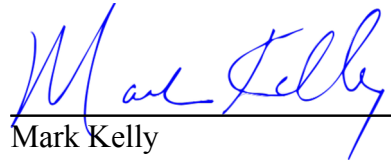
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Tina Smith  
United States Senator



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John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



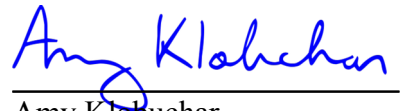
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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



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Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



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Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

cc: Russell Vought, Director, Office of Management and Budget  
Pam Bondi, Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice