

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 3, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden and Vice President Harris:

We thank you for your early commitment to ensuring the health and well-being of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) residing in urban communities. In light of the goals you outlined in the Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations, specifically to ensure that urban AI/ANs receive “quality health care, culturally relevant education, adequate and affordable housing, and other needed resources,” we urge the administration to form an Urban Indian Interagency Work Group to identify the critical needs of urban AI/AN populations and develop strategies to implement real change that uplifts urban AI/ANs.

Today, approximately seven out of ten AI/AN people reside in urban cities as a direct result of the federal government’s assimilation policies as well as the efforts of tribal members seeking out education and employment opportunities in urban areas. Despite the excellent efforts of Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) to provide critical healthcare, housing, employment, and other services, urban AI/AN populations nevertheless continue to be left out of many federal initiatives.

We are committed to advocating in Congress for increased funding and parity for UIOs. This is why we have introduced and are shepherding legislation through Congress to improve services provided to urban AI/AN populations. While we continue to advance these efforts, establishing an Urban Indian Interagency Work Group charged with identifying the needs and developing strategies to better serve urban AI/AN populations would prepare Congress and the Administration to more adequately advocate for and allocate federal resources where they are needed most. It is our hope that this Work Group would, at a minimum:

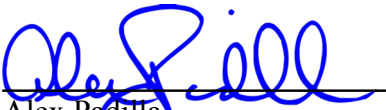
- Identify existing federal funding supporting UIOs and determine where increases are needed, where funding is lacking altogether, and what programs should be amended to allow for greater access by UIOs;
- Develop a federal funding strategy to build and coordinate the infrastructure necessary to pilot innovative programs and scale successful programs that address the needs and aspirations of urban AI/ANs in a holistic manner;
- Develop a wellness centered framework (as opposed to disease prevention) to inform health services that considers a food-as-medicine framework to inform nutrition and food security programs;

- Strengthen support for practice-based evidence of traditional healing approaches;
- Develop Urban Confer policies at the HHS and associated agencies, as well as at the VA; and
- Meet quarterly with UIOs to address other relevant issues.

To ensure the Work Group's efforts are productive, we urge you to include Urban Indian Organizations and agencies responsible for serving urban Indian populations that are housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration, the Economic Development Agency, FEMA, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and others as identified by urban Indian organizations.

Thank you for your commitment to better serving urban AI/AN populations. Working together, we believe we can make a real change in the lives of the 2.8 million AI/ANs who reside outside of their tribal government territories.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



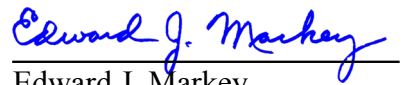
Tina Smith
United States Senator



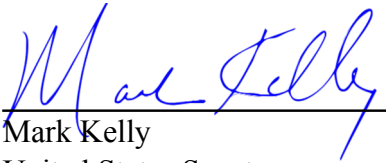
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



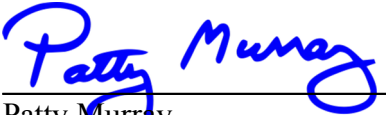
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



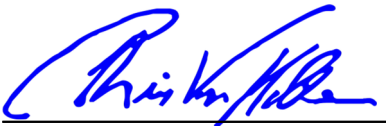
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator