



**NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**  
Advancing Excellence for All Native Students

The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Senate Committee on Appropriations,  
Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Rayburn House Office Building, 2358C  
Washington, D.C. 20510

***Witness Organization: The National Indian Education Association***  
***Subcommittee: Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies***  
***Subject of Testimony: Bureau of Indian Education/Department of Interior***

Dear Chairman Murkowski:

On behalf of the National Indian Education Association (NIEA), I respectfully submit the following testimony regarding Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Appropriations for programs that impact Native students.

NIEA is the most inclusive national organization advocating for improved educational opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Our mission is to ensure that Native students have access to a high-quality academic and cultural education, a goal that is only possible if Congress upholds the federal trust responsibility to tribes.

**The Federal Trust Relationship**

Congress has a federal trust responsibility for the education of Native students. Established through treaties, federal law, and U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the federal government's trust responsibility to tribes includes the obligation to provide parity in access and equal resources to all American Indian and Alaska Native students, regardless of where they attend school. The federal trust responsibility is an obligation shared between the Congress and the Administration for federally-recognized tribes.

**Priorities for the Department of Interior and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)**

NIEA highlights the following appropriations requests for Fiscal Year 2019 in the Department of Interior and the BIE.

**Education Construction**

**Provide \$430 million for Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) school construction and repair.** *An increase of \$191.7 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- This funding category includes school construction, facilities improvement and repair, and replacement school construction.

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- Schools operating within the BIE system are woefully outdated, and in some cases, dangerous for student and staff.
- The Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General published in September of 2016, an evaluation titled "Condition of Indian School Facilities," estimated the cost of fixing the dilapidated BIE schools, concluding that more than \$430 million would be needed to fix the problems already identified.

### **Broadband Internet Access**

**Provide \$40 million to extend broadband internet access.** *An increase of \$21.15 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- Technology is no longer a luxury in 2018, and serves as a necessity to keep up with today's advanced society.
- Less than ten percent of Indian Country has access to broadband internet technology.
- 60% of BIE schools do not have adequate digital broadband access, or computer access, to be aligned with college and career readiness standards.
- Expand e-rate for BIE schools, Native majority schools and Tribal Colleges and Universities.

### **Johnson O'Malley**

**Provide \$42 million for full funding.** *An increase of \$27.1 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- The Johnson O'Malley program has provided grants to supplement basic student needs since 1934.
- It is currently being used across the country in innovative ways to assist with the unique cultural and scholastic needs of Native students.
- The federal government allocated \$125 per student in JOM funding in 1995.
- Current funds (FY 2017) provide less than \$63.80 per student, which are often the only source through which Native students – including those in public schools – can engage in basic education activities.
- Tribal nations request additional funds to increase the current per student allocation to previous levels and prepare for student count increases in future years.

### **Juvenile Detention Education**

**Provide \$620,000 for juvenile detention education in BIA-funded facilities.** *An increase of \$120,000 above FY 2018 enacted.*

- This essential funding is used to provide educational services to detained and incarcerated youth at 24 BIA-funded juvenile detention facilities.

### **Student Transportation**

**Provide \$73 million for student transportation in the BIE system.** *An increase of \$16 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- BIE schools incur significant costs in transporting Native students to and from school.

- These costs are considerably higher than most school systems due to the often-rural location of BIE facilities.
- These high costs often lead to funding shortfalls, which then must either go unpaid or funded by diverting funds from other education programs.

### **Tribal Grant Support Costs**

**Provide \$90 million for tribal grant support costs for tribally-operated schools.** *An increase of \$9 million above FY 2018 enacted levels.*

- Tribal Grant Support Costs fund the administrative costs of existing tribally-operated schools.
- Full funding is critical as these funds help tribes expand self-governance and tribal control over education programs by allocating monies for administrative costs such as accounting, payroll, and other legal requirements.
- Schools must divert critical teaching and learning funding to cover any shortfalls in operational costs.

### **Facilities Operations**

**Provide \$109 million for BIE facilities operations.** *An increase of \$42.4 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- BIE schools use this funding for costs such as electricity, heating fuels, communications, GSA vehicle rentals, custodial services, and other vital operating expenses.
- For years, schools have only received roughly 50 percent of funding needed for these expenses. This shortfall is unacceptable as costs continue to rise for vital services.

### **Facilities Maintenance**

**Provide \$76 million for BIE facilities maintenance.** *An increase of \$16.5 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- BIE schools use this funding for the preventative and routine upkeep, as well as for unscheduled maintenance of school buildings, grounds, and utility systems.
- Underfunding of maintenance continues to be an issue as buildings are in poor conditions and cannot maintain proper standards.

### **Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP)**

**Provide \$431 million for the Indian School Equalization Program.** *An increase of \$24 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- These funds provide the core budget account for BIE elementary and secondary schools by covering teacher salaries, aides, principals, and other personnel.
- ISEP funds are often reallocated to cover the program cuts in other areas of education.
- ISEP must have adequate funding to ensure program needs are fulfilled and must not be reduced to provide funds for initiatives that have not been vetted by tribes.

### **Bureau of Indian Education Immersion Demonstration Grants**

**Provide \$5 million for BIE immersion programs.** *An increase of \$3 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- According to UNESCO, 74 Native languages stand to disappear in the next decade, with only 20 Native languages being spoken by 2050.
- Funding under the BIE reform efforts should strengthen tribal sovereignty to increase capacity to support Native language immersion schools and provide Native students equal access to learning their cultures and languages.
- Providing Immersion Demonstration Grant funds would protect the cultural and linguistic heritage of Native students in education systems by providing Native students immersion learning in order to strengthen their language, improve academic outcomes, and become future leaders of their tribes.

### **Tribal Education Agencies/Departments**

**Provide \$10 million to fund Tribal Education Agencies/Departments.** *An increase of \$7.5 million above FY 2018 enacted.*

- This funding assists Tribal Education Agencies (TEAs), who are uniquely situated at the local level to implement innovative education programs that improve Native education.
- Because they are administered by tribes, TEAs are best equipped to deliver education programs tailored to improve education parity for Natives.
- TEAs would use this much-needed funding to develop academic standards, assess student progress, and create math and science programs that require high academic standards for students in tribal, public, and BIE schools.
- Tribes utilizing self-governance over education have been very successful because they better understand the circumstances of their populations and can develop initiatives that meet local needs.

### **Conclusion**

With these concerns and through these recommendations on the FY 2019 Budget Request for Indian programs, NIEA looks forward to working with the Chairman to pass a budget that serves the unique needs of the only students that the federal government has a direct responsibility to educate – Native students. If you have any questions, please contact Matt de Ferranti, NIEA's Legislative Director, at [mdeferranti@niea.org](mailto:mdeferranti@niea.org) or 202-847-0039.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director, NIEA