STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
ON THE 1994 LAND-GRANT PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED BY THE USDA
SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG
ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

June 1, 2021

Summary of Requests
The Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994, which created the 1994 land-grant institutions (Tribal Colleges and Universities or 1994s), was signed into law 27 years ago. Yet, funding for the five modest 1994 land-grant programs, which funds 35 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), remains inadequate to address the growing agriculture needs and opportunities in Indian Country. The gross inequities of funding within the nation's land-grant system among the 1862, 1890, and 1994 institutions must be addressed. The 1994 land-grant programs are administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Rural Development. In the FY2022 Agriculture Appropriations bill, the Tribal Colleges and Universities respectfully request the following:

National Institute of Food and Agriculture:
- 1994 competitive Extension Grants: $12.25 million
- 1994 competitive Research Grants: $12.5 million
- 1994 Education Equity Grants: $8.75 million
- Native American Endowment Fund: $17 million
- Federally-Recognized Tribes Extension Program: $5 million

Rural Development
- TCU Essential Community Facilities Grants program: $10 million
- TCU IT Service Fund Pilot Program: $24 million

Inequities in Land-Grant System Funding
The first Americans, American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN), and their respective Tribal Colleges and Universities were not granted land-grant status until 1994, roughly 26 years after the first tribal college was established. At $50,000 per institution, the initial funding for 1994 land-grant programs was very modest. Today, 27 years later, funding remains untenably inadequate. A clear illustration of the inequity in funding can be found in the appropriations for the three land-grant groups. In FY2021, Congress appropriated a total of $538.447 million for extension activities to provide research-based education and services to farmers, ranchers, small businesses, and community members. The 1862s (State Land-grants) received $315 million in extension funding distributed by formula to 57 large state institutions. The 1890s received $62 million in extension funding distributed by formula to 19 Historically Black Colleges and Universities. In stark contrast, the 1994s received $8.5 million, just one and a half percent of the total, in extension funding to be competitively awarded as grants among 35 small, under-resourced Tribal Colleges and Universities. Similar inequities are reflected in research funding for the three land-grant groups. These inequities cannot be justified or allowed to continue. The first Americans, last to join the nation's land-grant family, deserve parity.

Land Grant Programs Help Support Public Health in Indian Country
In the current covid-19 pandemic, rural AI/AN communities are especially vulnerable. Underlying health disparities in Indian Country are compounded by the lack of access to comprehensive health care and the broadband services necessary to access innovative telemedicine resources. The 1994 Extension and Research programs focus on community needs, education and public service and are well positioned to serve these communities. But they currently lack the funding to develop and deliver critical preventative and responsive strategies to public health threats. If properly funded, 1994s could assist tribal governments in efforts to mitigate the spread of this and other viruses through culturally centered public health campaigns instructing individuals to practice social distancing and heighten sanitary measures. With sufficient funding, 1994s could study and prepare strategies to address public health threats to ranchers, farmers, and small businesses in these communities. Equitable funding will ensure that 1994s can capitalize on their tools and expertise to build capacity in community health, including pandemic response, and help protect Indian Country from devastating public health crises.

1994 Land-Grant Programs – Solid Investment in Advancing Indian Country
TCUs and their respective land-grant programs serve as the primary source of scientific inquiry, knowledge, and learning for tribal communities across the country. The 1994 Research program, funded at $4 million in FY2021, supports an impressive list of collaborative projects between TCUs and scientists at state universities or research centers. Oglala Lakota College (Kyle, SD) and Sitting Bull College (Fort Yates, ND) are conducting critical research into bison herd productivity and genetics. Salish Kootenai College (Pablo, MT) has built a premiere forestry program that emphasizes the relationship between the forest, tribal sovereignty, and cultural preservation. SKC is the first TCU to offer a four-year degree in forestry that prepares students for a career in forest management. United Tribes Technical College (Bismarck, ND) is spearheading research, education, and community development programming in agriculture, food, and nutrition. The college links research and teaching on sustainable agricultural production to food safety and preparation and provides community education to American Indian communities throughout North Dakota. It is essential that Native people explore and adopt new and evolving science and technologies for managing tribal lands and natural resources. With increased capacity and program funding, AI/ANs will become major contributors to the economic and agricultural base of the nation and the world.

Infrastructure Issues: TCU Essential Community Facilities Grants
Since 2000, the Rural Development – TCU Essential Community Facilities program has provided roughly $4 million annually in competitive grants to TCUs for infrastructure improvements. While this small funding source has supported infrastructure development on TCU campuses, there is still a long list of chronic facilities needs that remain unmet, according to a recent AIHEC survey conducted in June 2018. The 22 TCUs responding to the survey self-reported an estimated need of $332.5 million in Deferred Maintenance and Rehabilitation costs and $558 million to complete existing Tribal College Master Plans. The lengthy list of infrastructure needs includes student housing, faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, administrative offices, cafeterias, and student wellness/community fitness centers. The FY2022 President's Budget proposes $10 million to "purchase equipment and make capital improvements to educational facilities… An educated and skilled workforce is essential for attracting new business quality jobs, and economic prosperity." TCUs strongly support the $10 million proposal to begin addressing these urgent and outstanding infrastructure needs.

Rural Development – Rural Utility Service—TCU IT Service Fund Pilot Program
We urge the subcommittee to establish a pilot program within the USDA-Rural Utility Service to fund TCU IT service needs. This TCU IT Service Fund pilot program would support expansion and maintenance of crucial internet connectivity that is necessary for TCUs to continue serving their students and communities, and should receive initial funding of $24 million in set-aside funds. These funds, for which no match should be required, should cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and updates, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing at 1994s. Results of a recent cyberinfrastructure study[1] of the TCUs revealed the TCUs are paying connectivity rates significantly higher than the national average, and, therefore, cannot afford connectivity levels typical for two-year and four-year institutions. Further, the average TCU IT equipment replacement rate is 8.29 years, which is significantly higher than the industry standard replacement rate of three to five years. The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. Funding for a new TCU IT Service Fund pilot program will help address these deficiencies.

Rural Development – Community Facilities Loan Program
Through the Rural Development Communities Facilities Loan Program, federally recognized tribes, in partnership with 1994s, have built critically needed facilities in rural AI/AN communities. Recently, the Secretary of Education used her authority to forgive over $300 million in loans to a select number of institutions of higher education to allow them to focus on student and community service. We urge the Secretary of Agriculture to use his authority to provide similar loan forgiveness and relief to federally recognized tribes who are struggling to meet the terms of current loans, allowing them to focus instead on community needs.

Conclusion
The 1994s are efficiently and effectively bringing the promise of self-sufficiency to some of this nation's poorest and most underserved regions. The small federal investment in the 1994s has already paid great dividends in terms of increased productivity, renewed revenue sources, and improvements in Native health and tribal economies. Our reservation communities are second-to-none in their potential for benefiting from effective land-grant programs; and no institutions better exemplify the original intent of Senator Morrill's land-grant concept than the 1994s. Our FY2022 requests are made with a goal of increasing the capacity of the 1994 institutions. With increased support they will begin to fulfill their land-grant mission to support self-sufficient tribal communities who employ an Indigenous model that incorporates holistic planning, traditional knowledge, and the integration of education, research, and extension activities. We truly appreciate your support and recognition of the 1994s' important role in the nation's land-grant system. We ask you to renew your commitment to help move our students and communities toward self-sufficiency and request your full consideration of our FY2022 appropriations requests.

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[1] AIHEC TCU IT Service Fund: http://www.aihec.org/what-we-do/docs/FY22/TCU%20IT%20Fund%20$24M.pdf