

STATEMENT  
OF THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM  
SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

APRIL 30, 2015

This statement focuses on the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

On behalf of the nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), thank you for the opportunity to express our views and recommendations regarding the Department of Housing and Urban Development Tribal Colleges and Universities' Program for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY 2016).

**SUMMARY OF REQUESTS**

**Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):** Begun in Fiscal Year 2001, a TCU initiative had been administered by the HUD-Office of University Partnerships as part of the University Community Fund. These greatly needed competitive grants enabled TCUs to build, expand, renovate, and equip their facilities that are available to, and used by, their respective reservation communities. ***We strongly urge the Subcommittee to restore funding of the competitive HUD-TCU Grant Program, at \$5,435,000, and include language to permit a small portion of the funds appropriated may be used to provide technical assistance to institutions eligible to participate in this competitive grants program.***

**TCU SHOESTRING BUDGETS: "DOING SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE"**

Tribal Colleges and Universities are an essential component of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) education. Currently, 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of all American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. They serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, more than 70 percent of whom receive federal financial aid. In total, the TCUs annually serve about 89,000 AI/ANs through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are public institutions accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and, like all U.S. institutions of higher education must periodically undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Each TCU is committed to improving its community and the lives of its students through higher education and to moving AI/ANs toward self-sufficiency. To do this, TCUs must fulfill additional roles within their respective reservation communities functioning as community centers, libraries, tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and child and elder care centers.

TCUs have advanced AI/AN higher education significantly since they were first begun more than four decades ago, but many challenges remain. TCUs are perennially underfunded, and remain among the most poorly funded institutions of higher education in the country.

The tribal governments that have chartered TCUs are not among the handful of very wealthy gaming tribes located near major urban areas and regularly highlighted in the wide-spread media. Rather, they are some of the poorest governments in the nation. Some of the poorest counties in America are home to Tribal Colleges and Universities. In fact, there are TCUs located in seven of the nation's 10 poorest counties. The U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey specifies the annual per capita income of the U.S.

population as \$28,184. However, the annual per capita income of AI/ANs is reported to be \$16,777, or 40 percent lower than that of the general population.

The federal government, despite its direct trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, has never fully funded the TCUs' institutional operating budgets, authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978. In fact, TCU operating support is well below the level received by other institutions of higher education. The Administration requests and Congress appropriates approximately \$200 million annually towards the institutional operations of Howard University (exclusive of its medical school), the only other Minority Serving Institution (MSI) that receives institutional operations funding from the federal government. Howard University's current federal operating support exceeds \$20,000/student, because this is the level of need as determined by the U.S. government. In contrast, most TCUs receive \$6,355/Indian Student (ISC) under the Tribal College Act, less than 80 percent of the authorized level. TCUs have proven that they need and have earned an investment equal to -- at the very least -- the congressionally authorized level of \$8,000/Indian student. It is important to understand that we are by no means suggesting that our sister MSI, Howard University does not need or deserve the funding it receives; it does. We are only pointing out that the TCUs also need and deserve adequate institutional operations funding; however, TCU operating budgets remain chronically underfunded.

While TCUs do seek funding from their respective state legislatures for their students that are non-Indian state-residents (sometimes referred to as "non-beneficiary" students), successes have been at best inconsistent. TCUs are accredited by the same regional agencies that accredit mainstream institutions, yet they have to continually advocate for basic operating support for their non-Indian state students within their respective state legislatures. If these non-beneficiary students attended any other public institution in the state, the state would provide that institution with ongoing funding toward its day-to-day operations. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary institution, TCUs remain open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, believing that education in general, and postsecondary education in particular, is the silver bullet to a better economic future for their regions.

TCUs effectively blend traditional teachings with conventional postsecondary curricula. They have developed innovative ways to address the needs of tribal populations and are overcoming long-standing barriers to success in higher education for American Indians. Since the first TCU was established on the Navajo Nation in 1968, these vital institutions have come to represent the most significant development in the history of American Indian higher education, providing access to, and promoting achievement among, students who might otherwise never have known postsecondary education success.

Inadequate funding has left many TCUs with no choice but to continue to operate under distressed conditions. The need for HUD-TCUP funding remains urgent for construction, renovation, improvement, and maintenance of key TCU facilities, such as basic and advanced science laboratories, computer labs, and increasingly important student housing, day care and Head Start centers, and community services facilities. Although the situation has greatly improved at many TCUs in the past several years, some TCUs still operate -- at least partially -- in donated and temporary buildings. Few have dormitories and even fewer have student health centers. At Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates, ND competitively awarded HUD grant funds were leveraged to expand the college's usable space from 12,000 square feet (sf) to 100,000 sf over 10 years. Additionally, HUD grant dollars were used to address three leaking roofs that created a mold problem in the area referred to at the college as the "Hall of Buckets." HUD grant funds were also used to complete a renovation on its learning center, correcting major deficiencies, including recurring

sewer and water problems, handicap accessibility issues, lack of effective safety/security measures (surveillance and alarm systems), and outdated washroom facilities.

#### JUSTIFICATIONS

**Department of Housing and Urban Development:** Executive Order 13592 addressing American Indian education and strengthening of Tribal Colleges and Universities holds federal agencies accountable to develop plans for integrating TCUs into their various programs. TCUs work with tribes and tribal communities to address all aspects of reservation life, including the continuum of education, housing, economic development, health promotion, law enforcement training, and crime prevention. Likewise, federal agencies need to work with TCUs. To achieve results, Congress needs to hold the Administration accountable for the strengthening of the TCUs, including their physical plants and ensuring that they are routinely included as full partners in all existing and potential federal higher education programs. The HUD-TCU competitive grants program, administered by the Office of University Partnerships, is an excellent place to start. This competitive grants program has enabled TCUs to expand their roles and efficacy in addressing development and revitalization needs within their respective communities. No academic or student support projects have been funded through this program; rather, funding was available only for community-based outreach and service programs and community facilities at TCUs. Through this program, some TCUs have been able to build or enhance child care centers, including Head Start facilities and social services offices; help revitalize tribal housing; establish and expand small business development; and enhance vitally needed community library services. Unfortunately, not all of the TCUs were able to benefit from this small but very important program. The program staff at the Department has no budget to provide technical assistance with regard to this program. If a small portion of the appropriated funds were to be available for program staff to conduct workshops and site visits, more of the TCUs and their respective communities could benefit from this vital opportunity. ***We strongly urge the Subcommittee to support the HUD-TCU competitive grants program at \$5,435,000, and to include language that will allow a small portion of these funds to be used to provide technical assistance to TCUs, to help ensure that much-needed community services and programs can be continued in the communities served by the nation's TCUs.***

#### CONCLUSION

We respectfully request that beginning in FY 2016, Congress illustrate its support for the goals of the executive order aimed at strengthening Tribal Colleges by restoring the HUD-TCU competitive grants program and provide for technical assistance to help these dynamic institutions improve and expand their facilities to better serve their students and their tribal communities. Thank you for your continued support for the nation's TCUs and for your consideration of our Fiscal Year 2016 HUD appropriations request.