



Ahniwake Rose  
President & CEO

**MEMBERSHIP:**

**ALASKA**

Iłisaḡvik College

**ARIZONA**

Diné College  
San Carlos Apache College  
Tohono O'odham Community College

**CALIFORNIA**

California Indian Nations College  
California Tribal College

**KANSAS**

Haskell Indian Nations University

**MICHIGAN**

Bay Mills Community College  
Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College  
Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College

**MINNESOTA**

Leech Lake Tribal College  
Red Lake Nation College  
White Earth Tribal and Community College

**MONTANA**

Aaniih Nakoda College  
Blackfeet Community College  
Chief Dull Knife College  
Little Big Horn College  
Fort Peck Community College  
Salish Kootenai College  
Stone Child College

**NEBRASKA**

Little Priest Tribal College  
Nebraska Indian Community College

**NEW MEXICO**

Institute of American Indian Arts  
Navajo Technical College  
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute

**NORTH DAKOTA**

Cankdeska Cikana Community College  
Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College  
Sitting Bull College  
Turtle Mountain College  
United Tribes Technical College

**OKLAHOMA**

College of the Muscogee Nation

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

Oglala Lakota College  
Sinte Gleska University  
Sisseton Wahpeton College

**WASHINGTON**

Northwest Indian College

**WISCONSIN**

College of Menominee Nation  
Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa University

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Michelle Lujan Grisham  
New Mexico Governor  
490 Old Santa Fe Trail Capitol in Room 400  
Santa Fe, NM 87501

RE: Urgent Action Needed to Address Terminations and Hiring Freezes at SIPI

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

On behalf of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) and the 34 accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) we represent, I write to express deep concern over the recent terminations of probationary employees at Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) in Albuquerque, New Mexico. SIPI is a federally operated institution, administered by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) at the Department of Interior, experiencing severe workforce reductions following the implementation of Executive Order (EO) 14210, Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative, and the accompanying memorandum issued by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on January 20, 2025. These federal directives have mandated an immediate hiring freeze and the termination of probationary employees, resulting in a devastating impact on the ability of SIPI to serve Native students and communities effectively.

SIPI is an essential institution that provides culturally relevant higher education opportunities for Native students. SIPI serves 323 American Indian and Alaska Native students from 40 federally recognized Tribal Nations, offering seven (7) certificate and 13 associate degree programs, and almost 100 Full-time Equivalent (FTE) staff, essential to Tribal workforce development and self-determination. However, as a result of EO 14210 and the hiring freeze, SIPI has already suffered substantial staff reductions – in the middle of the school year, no less – with 24 percent of SIPI's workforce terminated, including vital instructors, support staff, and key leadership positions. Additionally, an estimated 25 percent of BIE staff responsible for providing essential educational support to SIPI may also be impacted. These terminations threaten the institution's future and undermine the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations.

The immediate consequences of these terminations are alarming. The abrupt reduction in workforce places SIPI at significant risk of losing its accreditation. This scenario would have long-term consequences for students, funding, and institutional sustainability. The loss of faculty and support staff will



severely disrupt student services, including course offerings, academic advising, career counseling, and financial aid assistance, critical to student retention and success. Without urgent intervention, the ability of SIPI to fulfill their mission and serve Native students will be severely damaged.

AIHEC urges your immediate action to protect SIPI and ensure its continued operation. The hiring freeze must be lifted, and SIPI must be granted an exemption from federal workforce reductions. SIPI exists to help uphold the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations, and the ongoing workforce reductions are a clear violation of those commitments. The terminated employees must be reinstated to restore institutional stability and prevent further harm to students and communities. Additionally, as the State Governor that hosts SIPI, we urge you to issue a formal statement opposing these terminations and calling for an exemption from EO 14210 for all federally operated Tribal higher education institutions. We also request that you contact and engage with the White House, the United States DOGE Service, the Department of the Interior, and the Office of Personnel Management to advocate for immediate workforce protections for SIPI. Furthermore, federal agencies must conduct Tribal Consultations with affected Tribes and their institutions to assess the grave impact caused by these actions entirely.

SIPI is not just a federally operated college; it is an essential institution that serves Native students and directly contributes to New Mexico's educational and economic well-being. We strongly urge you to take immediate action to secure an exemption from the hiring freeze and workforce reductions for SIPI and all BIE-operated institutions. Please let us know how we can work together to protect SIPI and the students they serve. Thank you for your leadership and attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

*Ahniwake Rose*

Ahniwake Rose  
President and CEO  
The American Indian Higher Education Consortium

Cc: The Honorable Stephanie Rodriguez, Secretary, New Mexico Department of Higher Education  
The Honorable Mimi Stewart, President Pro Tempore, New Mexico Senate  
The Honorable Javier Martinez, Speaker, New Mexico House of Representatives