



American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 121 Oronoco Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

Carrie L. Billy
President & CEO

January 29, 2015

MEMBERSHIP:

ALASKA

Ilisagvik College

ARIZONA

Diné College
Tohono O'odham Community College

KANSAS

Haskell Indian Nations University

MICHIGAN

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

MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College
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
Fort Belknap College
Little Big Horn 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
Fort Berthold Community College
Sitting Bull College
Turtle Mountain Community College
United Tribes Technical College

OKLAHOMA

College of the Muscogee Nation
Comanche Nation College

SOUTH DAKOTA

Oglala Lakota College

Sinte Gleska University

Sisseton Wahpeton College

WASHINGTON

Northwest Indian College

WISCONSIN

College of Menominee Nation

Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa Community College

WYOMING

Wind River Tribal College

ALBERTA, CANADA

Red Crow Community College

The Honorable Tom Udall
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Udall:

On behalf of the nation's 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), I am writing to express our support for the Building upon Unique Indian Learning and Development (BUILD) Act of 2015, which provides flexibility to engage diverse learning styles without compromising on accountability, thereby offering a brighter future for many American Indian students.

This bill proposes new approaches to improving both student learning outcomes and program administration. It seeks to formalize a relationship between the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Education. While strengthening the relationship between these two vital federal departments is, in and of itself, a creditable plan, we believe that any effort to consolidate the American Indian education programs into one or the other department will require very careful and thoughtful study, and we appreciate your willingness to engage the TCUs in a dialogue on this important issue.

The bill recognizes the unique sovereign relationship between the federal government and federally recognized tribes, and encourages partnerships between K-12 schools that serve large populations of Native students and the nation's Tribal higher education institutions -- the TCUs. Two areas addressed in this bill that are of particular interest to our institutions, are Native Language revitalization and growing the number of American Indian teachers and school administrators. Enhancing the capacity of TCUs is an ideal way, and proven effective, to preserving and revitalizing Native American languages that are in serious risk of disappearing as the number of fluent Native speakers declines. Additionally, this measure encourages more American Indians to become teachers and local school administrators, and advances the TCUs as prime vehicles to achieving this long-term goal of growing the ranks of American Indian teachers. This arrangement will not only provide invaluable role models for Native children and stable leadership and continuity in classrooms, it will help in addressing the current need for existing teachers to learn about the cultures of the communities in which they teach, and it expands the local economy of rural reservation communities.

American Indian/Alaska Native students deserve high quality and culturally significant education opportunities at all levels. We look forward to working with you and your excellent staff to advance the BUILD Act as a step toward making this a reality.

Sincerely,

Carrie L. Billy
c: AIHEC Board of Directors