

STATEMENT OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM
SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LABOR, HHS, EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES
April 3, 2015

This statement includes the Fiscal Year 2016 (FY 2016) requests of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), covering three areas within the Department of Education and one in the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families' Head Start Program.

Department of Education

I. Higher Education Act Programs:

- **Strengthening Developing Institutions:** Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act support institutions that enroll large proportions of financially disadvantaged students and have low per-student expenditures. The TCUs, which by any definition are truly developing institutions, are funded under Title III-A Sec. 316 and provide quality higher education opportunities to some of the most rural/isolated, impoverished, and historically underserved areas of the country. The goal of HEA-Titles III/V programs is "to improve the academic quality, institutional management and fiscal stability of eligible institutions, in order to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the Nation." The TCU Title III-A program is specifically designed to address the critical, unmet needs of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students and their communities, in order to effectively prepare them to succeed in a globally competitive workforce. Yet, in FY 2011 this critical program was cut by over 11 percent, by another four percent in FY 2012, and hit by sequestration – on the lowered baseline – in FY 2013. Although sequestration was not imposed in FY 2014 or FY 2015, the TCUs are still feeling the impact of the earlier cuts to this vitally important program. ***The TCUs urge the Subcommittee to restore the discretionary funding for HEA Title III-A, Sec. 316 to \$30,000,000 in FY 2016.***

Additionally, we ask that language be included clarifying that funds awarded under Title III, Sec. 316 shall remain available for an additional five years beyond the initial grant period, as is the case for grants awarded under the historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) program; the other Title III grants that are awarded by formula. The language requested is as follows:

"The committee directs the U.S. Department of Education to allow any funds paid to an institution and not expended or used for the purposes for which the funds were paid during the five-year period following the date of the initial grant award, may be carried over and expended during the succeeding five-year period, if such funds were obligated for a purpose for which the funds were paid during the five-year period following the date of the initial grant award."

The Department of Education has recently decided that it does not have the authority to extend the time that TCU-Title III grant funds must be formally obligated or encumbered beyond the initial five-year grant period. According to the Department, a TCU may not request even a routine one-year, no-cost extension on a Title III award, without forfeiting the chance to receive a new five-year grant during that year. Most of the initial five-year grants awarded by formula will close at the end of this current fiscal year. Many of the colleges are addressing long-term issues of inadequate facilities and insufficient infrastructure on their campuses using part of their Title III grant. Because these projects are long-term, while the funds are intended for these projects, not all of the funds have

been expended or formally obligated. As it stands now, funds remaining in the initial grant that are not spent or formally obligated by September 30, 2015 will revert to the U.S. Treasury and be lost to the program. Therefore, colleges will have to abandon their carefully crafted strategic plans for the funds and find other ways to use them by September 30, or lose them altogether. We do not believe this to be a wise or effective way of administering this critically needed grants program. AIHEC is working with the Department to get this apparent misinterpretation of current law fixed. The language that we are seeking is the same as that included in the Title III program for HBCUs, which as noted earlier, is the other formula-funded Title III program. By adding this same language to the TCUs program, the Department will be afforded the authority and direction needs to allow the extension of time to expend TCU Title III grant funds intended for long-term projects that for many reasons may require additional time to complete.

- **TRIO:** Retention and support services are vital to achieving the national goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020. TRIO programs, such as Student Support Services and Upward Bound, were created out of recognition that college access is not enough to ensure advancement and that multiple factors work to prevent the successful completion of postsecondary programs for many low-income and first-generation students and students with disabilities. Therefore, in addition to providing the maximum Pell Grant award level, it is critical that Congress also sustain student assistance programs, such as Student Support Services and Upward Bound so that low-income and minority students have the federal support necessary to allow them to remain enrolled in and ultimately complete their higher education degrees.

Pell Grants: The importance of Pell Grants to TCU students cannot be overstated. More than 70 percent of TCU students receive Pell Grants, primarily because student income levels are so low and they have far less access to other sources of financial aid than students at state-funded and other mainstream institutions. Within the TCU system, Pell Grants are doing exactly what they were intended to do -- they are serving the needs of the lowest income students by helping them gain access to quality higher education, an essential step toward becoming active, productive members of the workforce. However, the Department of Education changed its regulations to limit Pell eligibility from 18 to 12 full-time semesters, without any consideration of those already in the process of attaining a postsecondary degree. This change in policy impeded some TCU students from completing a postsecondary degree, which is widely recognized as being critical for access to, and advancement in, today's highly technical workforce.

TCUs are open enrollment institutions. Recent placement tests administered at TCUs to first-time entering students indicated that 70 percent required remedial math, 53 percent required remedial reading, and 60 percent required remedial writing. These results clearly illustrate just how serious this new Pell Grant eligibility limit is to the success of TCU students in completing a postsecondary degree. Students requiring remediation can use as much as a full year of eligibility enhancing their math, and/or reading/writing skills, thereby hampering their future postsecondary degree plans. A prior national goal was to provide access to quality higher education opportunities for all students regardless of economic means, at which TCUs have been extremely successful. While the new national goal intends to produce graduates with postsecondary degrees by 2020, this change in policy does not advance that objective. On the contrary, the change in the regulations will cause many low-income students to once again abandon their dream of a postsecondary degree, as they will simply not have the means to continue to pursue it. This new policy evokes the adage "*penny wise - pound foolish*" and could indeed compromise the laudable goal of producing a well-trained technically savvy workforce. *The TCUs urge the Subcommittee to continue to fund this essential program at*

the highest possible level, and to direct the Secretary of Education to implement a process to waive the impractical 12 semester Pell Grant eligibility for TCU students, to allow them to catch-up and excel.

II. Perkins Career and Technical Education Programs

- **Tribally-Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions:** Section 117 of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act provides a competitively awarded grant opportunity for tribally chartered and controlled career and technical institutions. ***AIHEC requests \$8,200,000 to fund grants under Sec. 117 of the Perkins Act.***
- **Native American Career and Technical Education Program (NACTEP):** NACTEP (Sec. 116) reserves 1.25 percent of appropriated funding to support American Indian career and technical programs. *The TCUs strongly urge the Subcommittee to continue to support NACTEP, which is vital to the continuation of career and technical education programs offered at TCUs that provide job training and certifications to remote reservation communities.*

III. American Indian Adult and Basic Education (Office of Vocational and Adult Education) This program supports adult basic education programs for American Indians offered by state and local education agencies, Indian tribes, agencies, and TCUs. Despite the absence of dedicated funding, TCUs must find a way, often using already insufficient institutional operating funds, to continue to provide adult basic education classes for those American Indians that the present K-12 Indian education system has failed. Before many individuals can even begin the course work needed to learn a productive skill, they first must earn a GED or, in some cases, even learn to read. The new GED exam, which was instituted in January 2014, is more focused on mathematics. As noted earlier, placement tests for TCU-entering students reveal an enormous need for math remediation. Additionally, the new GED test is fully computerized. While younger GED seekers may be well-versed and comfortable with computer-based testing, older and poorer citizens may not be. These factors indicate a further and growing need for adult basic educational programs and GED preparation on Indian reservations. TCUs must have sufficient and stable funding to continue to provide these essential services and to ensure their respective reservation community residents have the same chances to succeed that others throughout the country have. In FY 2015, Congress appropriated approximately \$569,000,000 million for Adult Education State grants. ***TCUs request the Subcommittee to direct that \$8,000,000 of the funds appropriated in FY 2016 for Adult Education State Grants be made available to make competitive awards to TCUs to help meet the growing demand for adult basic education and remediation program services on their respective Indian reservations.***

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH and HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM

Tribal Colleges and Universities Head Start Partnership Program (DHHS-ACF): Tribal Colleges and Universities are ideal partners to help achieve the goals of Head Start in Indian Country. The TCUs are instrumental in meeting the mandate that Head Start teachers earn degrees in Early Childhood Development or a related discipline. In FY 1999 Health and Human Services-Administration for Children and Families established the TCU-Head Start Partnership program. By 2004, TCUs had awarded more than 400 certificate and degrees. The 2007 reauthorization of the Head Start Act included mandates on education for Head Start workers and teachers, and specifically authorized the TCU-HS Partnership. Ironically, that was the last year of funding for the program. Today, 71 percent of teachers nationally, have required degrees and credentials. By contrast, in Indian Country (Region 11) only 36 percent of the teachers meet the requirements set forth in the Head Start Act reauthorization. Clearly, the need for proper training is high in Indian Country, and the TCUs are perfectly situated to help address this inexcusable gap

in training the tribal Head Start workforce. ***The TCUs request that of the over \$10,000,000,000 proposed for making payments under the Head Start Act \$5,000,000 be designated for the TCU-Head Start Partnership program, as reauthorized in PL 110-134, to ensure that TCUs can continue to provide high quality, culturally appropriate training for those working in reservation Head Start programs.***

We respectfully request that the Members of the Subcommittee continue and expand the federal investment in the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities and carefully consider our FY 2016 appropriations needs and requests.