



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

May 28, 2020

The Honorable Brian Schatz
United States Senate
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

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On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest organization serving the interests of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal nations and citizens, I write to express NCAI's support for the establishment of a Native American Languages Resource Center ("Center").

Providing Native children with a culturally rich quality education is a central component of the federal government's trust and treaty responsibility to tribal nations. Experts estimate that many of the approximately 148 Native languages that are still spoken are at risk of extinction within the next 50 to 100 years. To prevent this loss, a strong federal investment in Native languages is essential to the success of tribal communities and Native ways of life. This investment is especially critical as Native communities have been disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has threatened our Native elders who are the preservers and educators of our language and culture. Without action, years of progress in revitalizing and preserving Native languages will be lost.

The creation of the Center will aid in sustaining and rejuvenating tribal cultures and traditions rooted in those languages. Additionally, the Center will facilitate better educational outcomes in tribal communities because Native language programs have proven effective in promoting academic success among Native students. Having the Center created within a consortium of institutions also accurately reflects the diversity of Native American languages, cultures, and communities throughout the United States. Finally, the Center would provide the resources needed and best practices to support distance learning – a shared concern during the current crisis given the lack of access to broadband and other services across Indian Country.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to negatively affect Indian Country, tribal nations, schools, and Native communities must have resources to build and strengthen Native languages to ensure the long term well-being of tribal communities. Establishing a Native American Languages Resource Center is a positive step in this direction and would provide critical structural support for the revitalization of Native languages, which benefit the health and welfare of our communities.

For more information, please contact NCAI Director of Policy and Legislative Counsel Fatima Abbas at fabbas@ncai.org or Policy Analyst Nicholas Courtney at ncourtney@ncai.org.

Sincerely,

Kevin Allis
CEO