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House Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing on Interior and Environment Funding
Testimony in support of the DOI American Samoa Operations Account
April 1, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Simpson and Ranking Member Pingree, for the opportunity to submit testimony on the needs of American Samoa for their budget under the Interior Department and their Office of Insular Affairs.

As a non-voting delegate, I rely on my colleagues to move forward on policies that protect the fragile interests of my district, and to that end, I want to thank you and the other members of the committee for your support of the US territories.

As I'm sure you've heard me mention before, 80% of American Samoa's exports and port traffic revolve around the StarKist tuna operations that employ nearly 4000 people in our territory - second only to the local government as an employer. As is the case with many other single industry districts, our overall economic resiliency is much more vulnerable to fluctuations and set-backs.

Therefore, I am requesting level funding for the American Samoa Government Operations account at DOI at the FY24 amount of \$28.1M. I also ask for the continued inclusion of report language to set aside \$3M from that account specifically for our Community College as we invest in our territory's future. This account—which remained at \$22.75M for decades until it was finally reevaluated by this Committee in 2018—provides assistance to the territory for our schools, hospital, and court system and mitigates the challenges that come from our geographic and economic isolation.

American Samoa has one of, if not the weakest, economies in the country. For reference, D.C., which is of comparable geographical size to the territory, has the highest per capita GDP in the country of over \$200,000 and the lowest ranked state, Mississippi has a per capita GDP of around \$50,000. Meanwhile, American Samoa's per-capita GDP is less than half that of Mississippi at under \$20,000.

In contrast, we are proud to have among the highest military enlistment rates in the county. I humbly ask that you continue to support American Samoa so that our soldiers can remain focused on their mission rather than sending more money to their parents and families back home over 7000 miles away.

I want to thank you again Chair and Ranking Member for your time and consideration of my request. While not a very large amount in the grand scheme of things, this small account which funds our hospital and education system continues to do so much good for the people of American Samoa.