

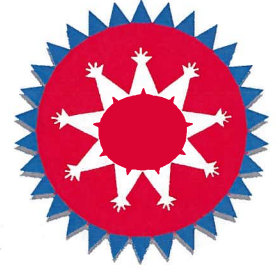
Oglala Sioux Tribe

PINE RIDGE INDIAN RESERVATION

P.O. Box #2070

Pine Ridge, South Dakota 57770

1(605) 867-5821 Ext. 8420 (O) / 1(605) 867-6076 (F)



Julian Bear Runner

July 15, 2019

Chairman Ruben Gallego
Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples
United States House of Representatives
House Natural Resource Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Paul Cook
Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples
United States House of Representatives
House Natural Resource Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Support for H.R. 895, the Tribal School Federal Insurance Parity Act

Dear Chairman Gallego and Ranking Member Cook:

I am writing on behalf of the Oglala Sioux Tribe to thank you for holding the July 16, 2019 hearing on H.R. 895, the Tribal School Federal Insurance Parity Act. We strongly support this important bill and have actively promoted its concept for years. The bill is a tribal initiative: one borne from our desire for our tribally controlled grant schools, which operate under the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988, Pub. L. 100-297 (TCSA), and the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEAA), to save money on healthcare benefits for their employees. Our Tribe has worked with and supported the Oglala Lakota Nation Education Coalition (OLNEC) in the long effort to realize what this bill will accomplish.

H.R. 895 would allow our six tribally controlled grant schools on our Pine Ridge Indian Reservation to access Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) and Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI). FEHB is an employer-sponsored group health insurance program administered by the Office of Personnel Management that provides comprehensive health care coverage for federal employees, annuitants, and their families and FEGLI provides group term life insurance.

Access to these federal programs would result in our schools paying substantially lower rates for employee healthcare in the same manner that Bureau of Indian Education schools currently do. This will bring about significant savings for our tribally controlled grant schools, which currently struggle to make ends meet, to the point of being forced to use Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) dollars to cover myriad funding shortfalls. Our tribally controlled grant schools will be able to use the savings that will be achieved from H.R. 895 for instructional services, teacher salaries and classroom amenities, all toward improving the quality of our students' educations and enhancing their school experiences. Our tribally controlled grant schools would no longer be encumbered with the heavy financial burden of high health care premiums for their employees.

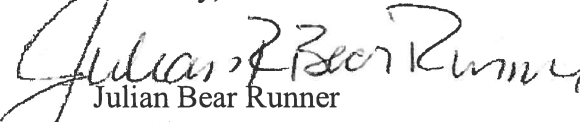
We support the written testimony provided by Ms. Cecelia Fire Thunder from OLNEC, and we refer you to that testimony for our tribally controlled grant schools' specific health care costs. We note that such testimony sets out that access to FEHB would save our Little Wound School over \$1 million. Please consider the good those dollars could do for our tribal members' education.

Please see the attached Resolution of the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council supporting the passage of S. 279, the sister bill to H.R. 895. The Senate and House versions of the bill are exactly the same.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing. I ask that this letter be included in the hearing record.

We also express heartfelt thanks to Representative Dusty Johnson for introducing H.R. 895. We call upon this Subcommittee to move the bill forward and work toward its enactment. It is a good bill: one that aligns with our 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie that established the United States' obligations to provide for the education of our tribal youth.

Sincerely,



Julian Bear Runner
President