

**STATEMENT OF CARRIE L. BILLY, PRESIDENT & CEO**  
**SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
**ADDRESSING HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

February 26, 2019

**REQUEST SUMMARY**

On behalf of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), thank you for this opportunity to present our Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) appropriations recommendations for the 29 colleges funded under Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act (Tribal College Act); the two tribally chartered career and technical postsecondary institutions funded under Title V of the Tribal College Act; the two Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) postsecondary institutions; and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). The BIE administers each of these programs, with the exception of IAIA, which is funded in its own account. We respectfully recommend the following funding levels:

**DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**

- \$81,893,000 to fund institutional operations under Title I (\$64,083,000) and Title II (\$17,000,000), along with TCU Endowments (\$109,000) and technical assistance (\$701,000), of the Tribal College Act. This funding would provide the Congressionally authorized amount of \$8,000/Indian student for first time since the enactment of the Tribal College Act more than 40 years ago. This request also provides an additional \$100,000 for necessary technical assistance, which has been level-funded for 14 years despite growing demands for accountability, student success, and other assistance from new TCUs and TCU leadership.
- \$10,000,000 for Title V of the Tribal College Act, which provides partial institutional operations funding for two tribally chartered postsecondary career and technical institutions.
- \$10,210,000 for the Institute of American Indian Arts.
- \$25,000,000 for Haskell Indian Nations University and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, the Bureau of Indian Education's two postsecondary institutions.
- \$31,000,000 for TCU Infrastructure Improvement, authorized under section 113 of the Tribal College Act, yet never funded.

**OPPORTUNITY AND INNOVATION IN INDIAN COUNTRY**

The nation's 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states. TCU geographic boundaries encompass 80 percent of American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust lands. American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) TCU students represent more than 230 federally recognized tribes and hail from more than 30 states. Nearly 80 percent of these students receive federal financial aid and more than half are first generation students. In total, TCUs serve more than 130,000 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and other rural residents each year through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are public institutions accredited by independent regional accreditation agencies and, like all U.S. institutions of higher education, must regularly undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education

and to moving AI/ANs to self-sufficiency. Our collective vision is strong sovereign Tribal nations through excellence in Tribal higher education. To achieve this vision, TCUs have become workforce and job creation engines, public libraries, tribal archives, small business incubators, career guidance centers, community computer labs, middle and high school STEM/bridge summer camps. They are operators of community farms and gardens, economic development centers, childcare centers, Native language centers, and applied research hubs for everything from natural resources to food sovereignty and community behavioral health.

Despite the great hope and opportunity that higher education brings to Tribal communities as well as the trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, the federal government has never fully funded TCU institutional operations as authorized under the Tribal College Act. But TCUs are resilient and resourceful, and we are proud to be leading the nation in many areas, including preparing an AI/AN workforce of nurses, land managers, and teachers for our Native schools. For example, half of all AI/AN special education teachers in Montana are graduates of one college: Salish Kootenai College. TCUs prepare other professionals in high-demand fields, including agriculture and natural resources management, human services, IT, and building trades. By teaching the job skills most in demand on our reservations, TCUs are laying a solid foundation for tribal economic growth, which is the *only* way to move tribes and tribal members to self-sufficiency. Yet we know that workforce development is not enough. TCU leadership understands that we must do more to accelerate the move to self-sufficiency – we must move beyond simple workforce training. Today, TCUs are tackling the tougher – but much more significant – issue of job creation, because we know that to break the cycle of generational poverty and end the culture of dependency that grips so much of Indian Country, simply filling jobs that would be filled anyway is not enough. We must create new industries and new businesses and build a new culture of innovation. Our job creation initiative is focusing initially on advanced manufacturing, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy, National Laboratories, TCUs, and industry. Already, we are seeing results, with new TCU-tribal-industry partnerships, new contracting opportunities, and new jobs for our students and graduates.

Tribal Colleges continually seek to instill a sense of hope and identity within Native youth, who will one day lead our tribal nations. Unacceptably, the high school dropout rate for Native students remains around 50 percent. TCUs are working with local schools to create a bridge for AI/AN students as early as elementary school, encouraging them to stay focused on achievable goals, finish high school, and go on to the local TCU. TCUs offer dual credit courses for high school students, provide math teachers for local high schools to improve course delivery, and host weekend academies, after school programs and summer camps for middle and high school students. At the other end of the spectrum, TCUs offer GED/HiSET training and testing and have 2+2 partnerships to bridge programs with regional universities. All are solid steps to bolster future prospects for Native youth and break the cycle of generational poverty.

### **TCUs: A SOUND FEDERAL INVESTMENT**

Vivianna Castillo-Roybal, like many TCU students, is not waiting until she graduates to positively impact her community. Growing up in the foster care system and far removed from her tribal culture and community, Vivianna enrolled in Leech Lake Tribal College in Cass Lake, MN to reconnect to her Anishinaabe heritage. Once there, Vivianna gained the confidence that only comes when you are secure in your identity. She will graduate this spring from LLTC with an associate degree in STEM education – that is success enough. However, Vivianna has done

much more: in 2016, she was part of a group that traveled to a conference for youth foster children in Washington, D.C. On the way home, she and others wrote the first draft of the foster care sibling bill of rights, which would create guidelines in state law to help siblings be placed together. Last spring, Vivianna was a part of the effort to ensure the bill's enactment into law by the Minnesota State Legislature. She is now working on a broader foster children bill of rights, which already has been enacted in other states. Vivianna credits much of her success to the support and education she could only receive at LLTC.

Every Tribal College has stories like Vivianna's: transformative change as students across Indian Country find their identity and develop the skills and confidence to serve. This is the power of the federal investment in Tribal Colleges.

**TCU INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT: NEEDED AFTER 40 YEARS (\$31 MILLION):** We urge Congress to fund section 113 (25 U.S.C. 1813) of the Tribal College Act, established more than 40 years ago, and finally create a Tribal Higher Education Infrastructure Improvement Program. For TCUs to realize our goals of strengthening our Tribes as sovereign nations and building a 21<sup>st</sup> century Native workforce, TCUs must have the facilities and infrastructure capable of educating and training students in a safe and advanced environment. This simply cannot be done on the scale needed in classrooms with leaking roofs and exposed and substandard electrical wiring; outdated computer labs; students sleeping in cars and trucks because there are no dorms; and the slowest – yet most expensive – internet access of any institution of higher education in the country. Yet, that is what we ask TCUs to do. Last year, AIHEC conducted a survey of 22 TCUs, which revealed a list of chronic facility-related needs, including student housing, faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, laboratories, administrative offices, cafeterias, and student wellness/community fitness centers. The 22 TCUs have a self-reported estimated need of \$332.5 million in Deferred Maintenance and Rehabilitation costs and \$558 million to complete existing Tribal College Master Plans.

As a first step, we request that the Subcommittee work with your colleagues in the Senate to ensure that the Department/Bureau of Indian Education conducts a 40-year overdue required study on the current condition of TCU facilities and by a date certain submits a report identifying critical TCU renovation and new construction needs (25 U.S.C. 1812). A comprehensive and unbiased TCU Facilities Report, to include all 37 TCUs, would be of tremendous benefit to our colleges and, we believe, to this Subcommittee. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee direct the Bureau of Indian Education to use administrative funds to conduct the long awaited TCU Facilities Report and further, that \$31 million be allocated in FY2020 to begin addressing the infrastructure needs of TCUs.

**CHALLENGES: INDIAN STUDENT COUNT, TAX BASE, AND GROWTH**

**ISC Formula and Non-Beneficiaries:** As noted earlier, TCU operations funding remains insufficient and our budgets are further disadvantaged, because, unlike other institutions of higher education, most TCUs receive operations funding based on the number of Indian students served, with "Indian student" defined as a member of a federally recognized tribe or a biological child of an enrolled tribal member. Yet, approximately 15 percent of TCU enrollments are non-Indian students. Many TCUs seek operating funds from their respective state legislatures for non-Indian state-resident students ("non-beneficiary students"), but success has been inconsistent. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary

institution, TCUs are open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, because we know that postsecondary education is *the* catalyst to a better economic future in rural America.

**LOCAL TAX AND REVENUE BASE:** TCUs cannot rely on a local tax base for revenue. Although tribes have the authority to tax, high reservation poverty rates, the trust status of reservation lands, and the lack of strong reservation economies hinder the creation of a reservation tax base. As noted earlier, on Indian reservations that are home to TCUs, the unemployment rate can well exceed 70 percent. By contrast, the national unemployment rate is currently 4.0 percent.

### **GROWTH OF TCUS**

Since the enactment of the Tribal College Act more than 40 years ago, TCUs have never received the modest Congressionally- authorized funding level (currently \$8,000 per Indian student). Yet, we are so close: an increase of \$11 million over the FY2019 level is all that we need to fully fund Tribal Colleges for the first time *ever*. In the context of other federal programs, our request is quite modest. For example, the only other minority serving institution that receives operating funding from the federal government, Howard University, received \$205,788,000 for undergraduate programs in FY2019, or about \$23,000 student, along with \$3 million for its endowment. We ask only for \$8,000 per student for the Title I TCUs.

Over the past 10 years, this Subcommittee has worked diligently to provide the extra resources needed to enable *all* TCUs to be funded on an academic year schedule. For this, we are extremely grateful. The benefit to TCUs derived from being able to plan an annual budget and start the academic year with operating funding has been tremendous. Yet, during the time that it has taken to provide this funding for the TCUs, *four* new Tribal Colleges have become eligible to receive funding under Title I of the TCU Act. These are College of the Muscogee Nation (Okmulgee, OK), Red Lake Nation College (Red Lake, MN), Tohono O'odham Community College (Sells, AZ), and White Earth Tribal and Community College (Mahnomon, MN). Unfortunately, Title I funding has not even kept pace with inflation, much less received increases sufficient to adequately support new colleges. Title I TCUs, in particular, often must endure years without any operating increases at all. For example, between FY2014-2018, funding for the 28 TCUs remained stagnant despite the growing need for higher education across Indian Country. As we move forward, we are becoming increasingly worried about the TCUs' operating funding: at least three new TCUs could join the pool soon. These are Alaska Pacific University, California Tribal College, and San Carlos Apache College, all of which are moving toward funding eligibility. The addition of these TCUs is important for Indian Country, but only if adequate support is available to ensure that they can operate effectively.

### **CONCLUSION**

TCUs provide quality higher education to thousands of AI/ANs and other rural residents and provide essential community programs and services to those who might otherwise not have access to such opportunities. The modest federal investment in TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development and has significantly reduced social, health care, and law enforcement costs. Continuation of this investment makes sound moral and fiscal sense. We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support of the nation's TCUs and your thoughtful consideration of our FY2020 appropriations requests.