

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2026

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Colleague:

As you begin to draft the Fiscal Year 2027 Interior, Environmental, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, I encourage you to consider the importance of the federal investment in Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs).

As strong supporters of this nation's TCUs, we thank you for your commitment to these important institutions. We request that you build on the progress we made over the past few years by providing robust funding for institutional operations and technical assistance under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act [25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.] for 31 TCUs funded under Titles I, II, and V of the Act, two TCUs funded under the Snyder Act [25 U.S.C. 13], and one TCU funded under the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Culture and Art Development Act [20 U.S.C. 4411]. Strong funding would allow these institutions to continue offering place-based, high-quality postsecondary education opportunities to American Indians and Alaska Natives in some of the most impoverished and geographically isolated regions of this country. Further, it is critically important that, should any new TCU become eligible for funding under Title I, the overall funding line should increase to ensure that existing TCUs are held harmless and not experience a reduction in per-student funding levels.

TCU students are often older than the traditional college student, including single heads of households who are seeking to provide a better future for their families. TCUs offer students a chance to develop the skills they need to succeed in the workforce while continuing to care for their families and communities. TCUs not only provide postsecondary education and workforce training opportunities, but they also serve as public, cultural, and community centers and as primary employers for their communities. For 2023, alumni from TCUs contributed \$3.8 billion to the national economy, supporting the equivalent of 40,732 jobs.¹ Additionally, for every \$1.00 invested in TCUs, (1) students of those colleges and universities gain \$7.50 in lifetime earnings, (2) taxpayers gain \$1.60 in added tax revenue and public savings, and (3) society gains \$4.80 in added income and social savings.¹

¹ American Indian Higher Education Consortium. (2025). *Building local economies of scale: The impact of Tribal Colleges & Universities in rural America*.

Funding for basic institutional operations of the tribally chartered institutions under Title I of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Assistance Act is enrollment-driven, based on a per Indian student allocation, known as the Indian Student Count (ISC). For the purposes of allotting these funds, only those students who are enrolled citizens of a federally recognized tribal nation or the biological child of a tribal citizen may be counted. Unlike the majority of public higher education institutions, most TCUs are located on federal trust lands; states have no obligation to provide supplemental funding for TCUs. Most states do not provide any additional funding for TCU budgets, yet on average, non-Indian state-resident students account for approximately 16 percent of overall TCU enrollments. As open enrollment institutions accessible to all, federal support is critically important as the primary means to fund TCUs' operating budgets and growing technical assistance needs.

In the nearly 50 years since the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act (TCCUAA) was enacted, the number of TCUs has increased fivefold, and full-time American Indian and Alaska Native student enrollments in TCUs have increased by more than 300 percent—including students from more than 250 federally recognized tribal nations at more than 90 locations in 16 states. Despite their impressive growth, TCUs remain chronically underfunded, causing persistent issues with recruiting and retaining qualified faculty and staff and maintaining accreditation.

While we appreciate the Subcommittee's strong support for TCUs, we respectfully note that, even with prioritized increases for TCUs and other tribal programs and institutions within the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill, TCU institutional operating budgets have not kept pace with inflation and remain short of the authorized level of \$12,327* per Indian student (*\$8,000 adjusted for inflation since 2008). For the current academic year, the Title I-funded institutions received \$7,981 per Indian student towards operations. While TCUs have received consistent funding of \$87.926 million since FY 2023, the average ISC amount has decreased by almost \$1,500 over the years due to increased student enrollments. Further, technical assistance – a required use of funds under Title I of the TCCUAA – remains critically important to effectively address the unique and growing technical assistance needs across all tribal colleges. Technical assistance is funded from within the same Bureau of Indian Education - Post Secondary Programs (Forward Funded) - Tribal Colleges and Universities line item as TCUs' operating budgets. Consequently, we request robust funding for that line item to fund both the institutional operations of TCUs and their technical assistance

Finally, despite the TCCUAA mandating an infrastructure review since 1978, the required study remains incomplete 48 years later. Providing a designated appropriations for this long-overdue study – separate from and in addition to continuing to provide sustained increases for TCUs' Facilities Improvement & Repair (FI&R) funding – would ensure its completion without diverting resources from this critical funding stream. To build a modern tribal workforce, TCUs need safe, well-equipped facilities. This is impossible with leaking roofs, outdated wiring, inadequate computer labs, and a severe lack of student housing.

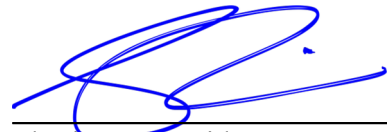
Ultimately, support for TCUs translates to stronger local economies, but inadequate funding can impede these institutions from having the necessary resources to enhance their programs in response to the changing demands of the 21st century.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's past support of TCUs, and we look forward to working with you to continue this critical investment in tribal higher education as the FY2027 appropriations process advances. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



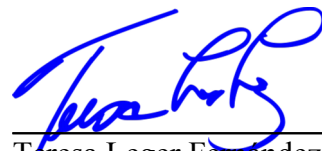
Dusty Johnson
Member of Congress



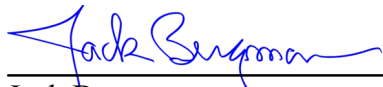
Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress
Kansas Third District



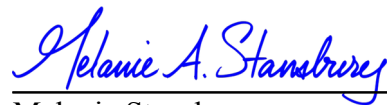
Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress



Teresa Leger Fernandez
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Melanie Stansbury
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



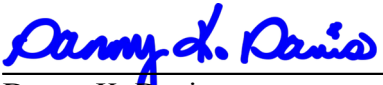
Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress




Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



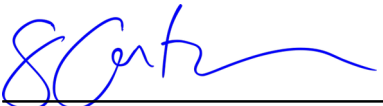
Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress